

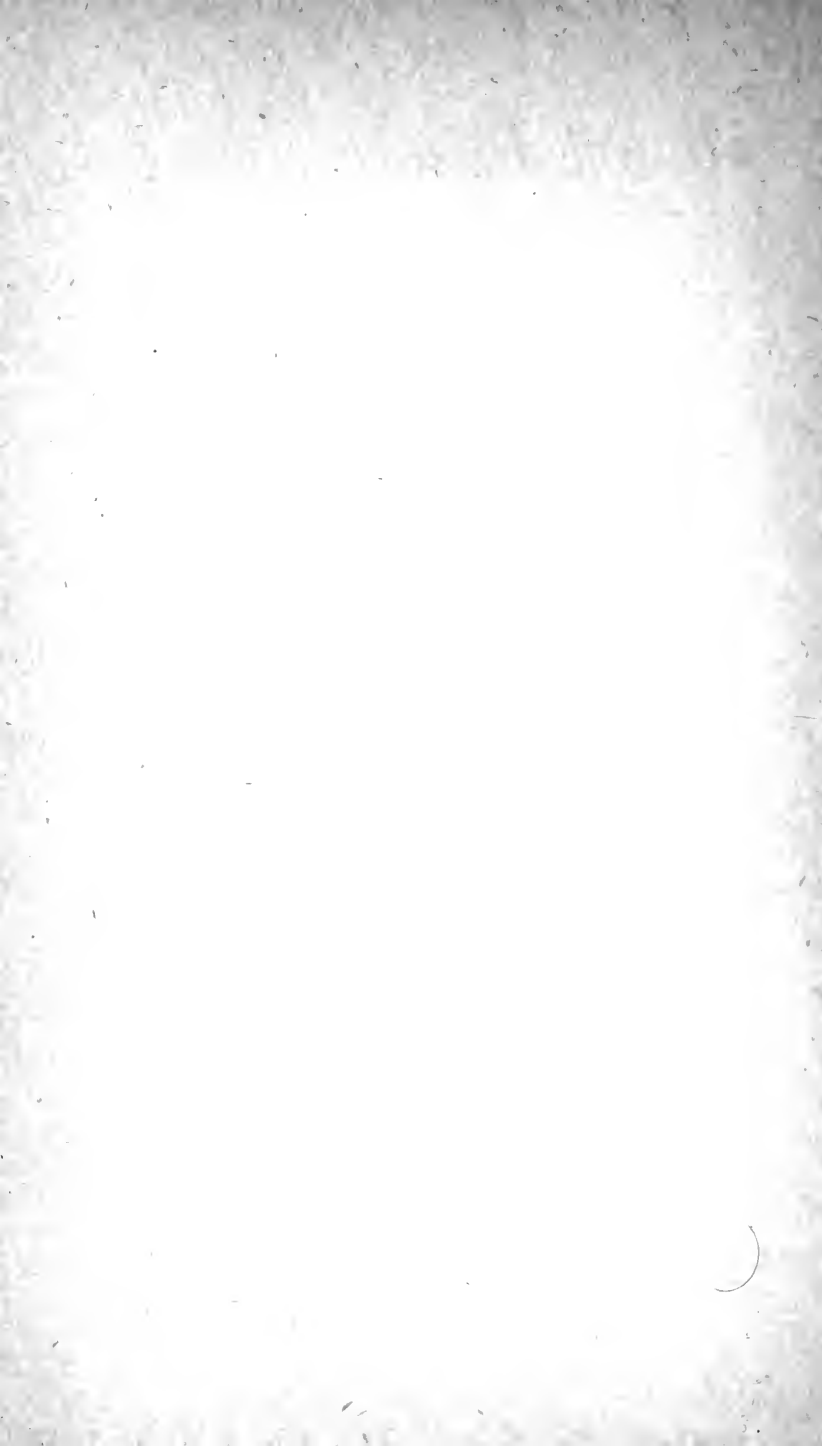
OCT 29 1955

A stylized handwritten signature or set of initials, possibly 'J' or 'K', with a horizontal line crossing through it.

Mr. J. A. Gantner
26 E. 14th Avenue
Buffalo 15, New York

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MOTION PICTURE ACTING



Motion Picture Acting

BY LILLIAN ALBERTSON



Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York

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Foreword

In writing this series of articles, my aim is primarily to aid those who wish to make acting their profession—but I am not unmindful that there are many people in other professions, as well as in private life, who can benefit by what is said here if they will take the trouble to put some of these ideas to work.

It cannot help but make you more successful at the “job of living” to speak a little better, to be more poised, and to be more interested in, and interesting to, those about you.

Anyone who has the desire and is not physically handicapped can develop a graceful carriage. Anyone who can speak at all can learn to use more cultivated speech and can acquire a more pleasing voice. And what a boon that last would be to the jangled nerves of this explosive, jittery old world in which we live!

While these talks are decidedly “professional” (and who am I to write any other way, after more than forty years as actor, director, and dramatic coach?) still, I have written them for the amateur. They are, therefore, as nontechnical and as simple as I know how to make them. The articles on posture, movement, and speech are not only pertinent to the training of an actor but to folk in every walk of life.

Every man, woman, and child is a “salesman.” We—every last one of us—must sell the world a bill of goods before we can obtain what we want out of life. But, first of all, we must “sell” ourselves, *our personalities, our talents.*

If we were selling canned tomatoes we would never dream of presenting them in battered containers or with stained, faded labels, would we?

Well, we can’t sell ourselves that way, either. And remember this—no one ever made a good job of selling anything on which he himself was not sold. So, cultivate self-esteem but see to it that the product is worth the price you are asking!

People are too busy, living their own lives, to look beyond our exteriors in the first encounter. They haven’t time to wait for us to *grow* on them. It just doesn’t make sense to expect them to search beneath the surface for our sterling qualities when

we habitually sell them off us in voice, appearance, and manner.

Yes, every one of us is a salesman. . . . *How's business?*

It is equally and eternally true that, "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players. . . ." We play the roles in which we cast ourselves (or meekly allow ourselves to be cast) from the cradle to the grave.

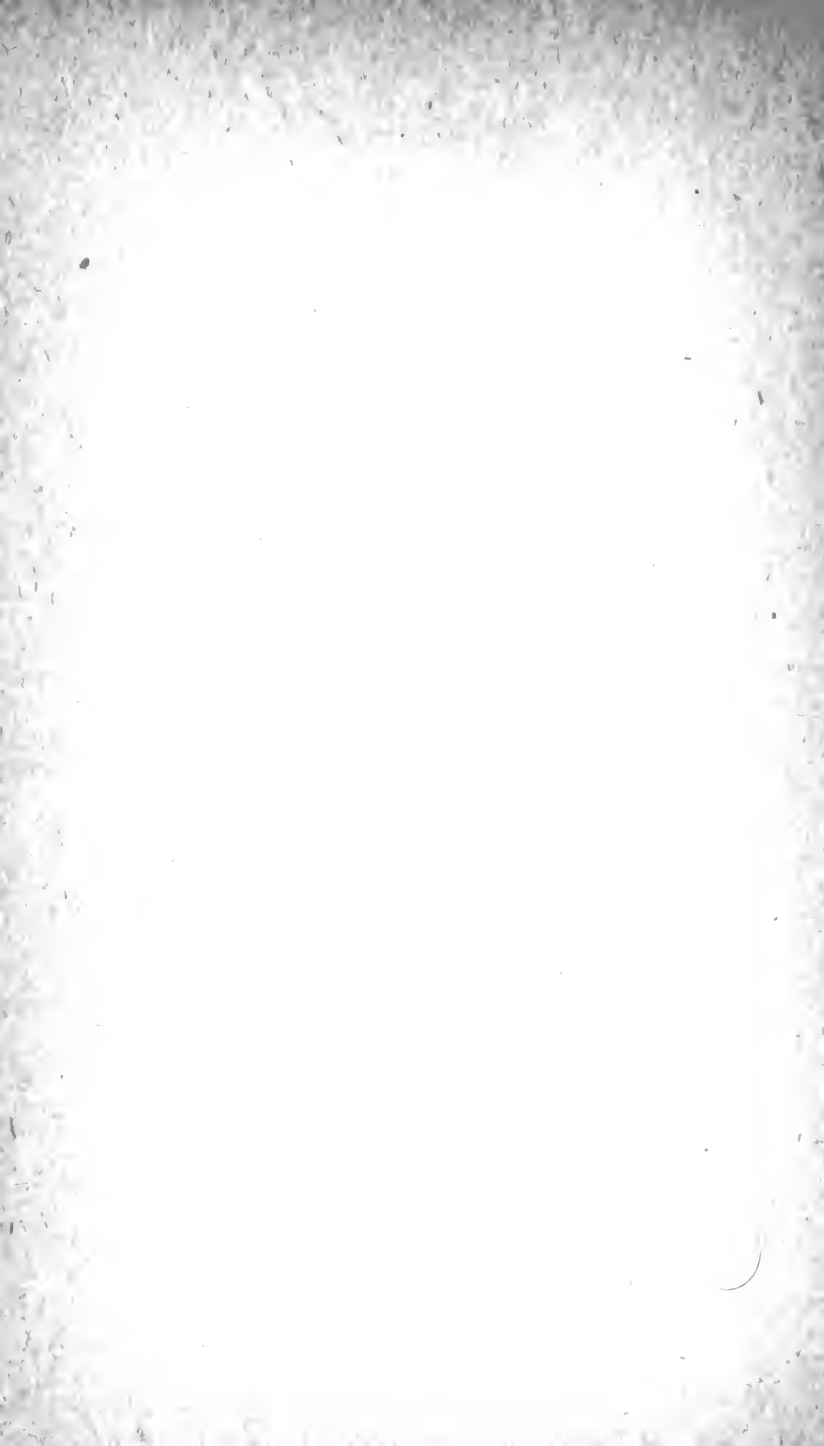
Why not make it a *good* performance?

What I say in these talks is what I have said to the many actors I have been privileged to direct, among whom are some of the greatest stars of stage and screen, and to the young actors who are now in process of becoming the stars of the future.

If I can help you to prepare yourself for the opportunity when it comes, or to avoid a few of the pitfalls along the way, then I shall feel I have accomplished enough to have made the writing of these articles worth while. Your success will be my everlasting, if vicarious, triumph, and will give me the greatest happiness.

I'll be seeing you—in Hollywood!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Hilary Altman". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

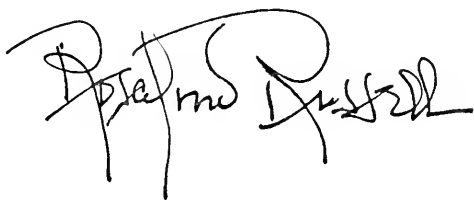


Rosalind Russell

Perhaps I should not have read certain passages in this book before having my little say about it. I might be charged with letting Miss Albertson's very flattering references to myself color my opinion. Yet that really isn't true. My warm approval of her work is sincere.

For a long time I thought an expertly done book on screen acting badly needed indeed. Then I read Miss Albertson's talks, as she calls them. To me they seem so lucid, so penetrating in analysis, that those who want to make acting a profession cannot fail to derive benefit from them.

Yet not alone the beginning players, but the rest of us too. Any player worth his salt is still learning when the final curtain falls. And Miss Albertson is one from whom to learn. As actress, director and dramatic coach she has enjoyed a rich and varied experience. And she distills from that enviable background a charming and informative book.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rosalind Russell". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a prominent vertical line extending downwards from the "R".



Cary Grant

Dear Lillian:

Yesterday I had the pleasure of reading your new book and I venture to say that those who have not been unsuccessful in the profession of acting would agree that your book should be read by every young man and girl before determining upon acting as a career. And to those who have that final determination, your book can only be of the utmost help and greatest value. Sincere and personal regards, Lillian.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cary Grant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the beginning and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Adela Rogers St. Johns

Dear Lillian:

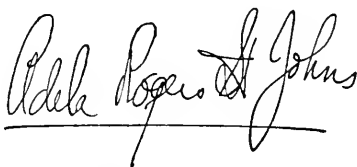
It doesn't always follow that those who can do a thing magnificently can also tell the other fellow how to do it. After sitting up half the night, doggone it, to read Motion Picture Acting, I find you one of the rare ones and the book exciting as well as instructive.

When your name in lights on Broadway always brought me into a theater, I thought you one of our finest actresses -- as, of course, who didn't? And you gave me many warm and beautiful hours with only the footlights between us to add to your art and spontaneity. Now you've put it down on paper.

This book will prove a testing ground for youngsters who think they can act, or want to act. That's a work of importance. It is vital to find talent when it is there, wherever it may be, on a farm, in the dramatic department of high school or college or in little theaters or just in the heart of someone young or old who loves acting. It's also important to save from heartbreak those who have aspiration without ability. Your book can test for these things and accomplish both.

Beyond that it's a definite textbook on real acting, full of episodes, stories, anecdotes and activity. It is my own opinion that it would help a great many who aren't going into the theater nor into acting as an art, but who would like to gain the ease and poise and ability to put over a story or convey an idea which the actor or actress has. I got a lot out of it from that standpoint and think it should be stressed. I can remember watching Ethel Barrymore in drawing room conversation and thinking, "It's hardly fair. She can make everything she says so vital, so wonderful, so true. She knows how. That's her genius and her training." As I read your book I thought that a lot of people could gain some of that in its value just for home use and social gain.

Bless you for it. As always, the heart shines through.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Adela Rogers St. Johns". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. Below the signature is a single horizontal line.



Leo McCarey

This book seems to me a very clear and simple statement on what acting is all about.

The Author is never ponderous. She writes in a light vein and with a certain humor; but, nevertheless, there is an unmistakable authority in everything she says.

Her long years of experience as actress, producer and director in the theatre have earned for Lillian Albertson the right to speak as she does, and I believe her book will be most helpful to young people everywhere who wish to make a career in motion picture acting.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Leo McCarey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Leo" is written with a large, stylized 'L' that loops around. The last name "McCarey" is written with a prominent 'M' and a long, sweeping tail that ends in a checkmark-like flourish.



Jesse L. Lasky

As I read your book, MOTION PICTURE ACTING, my mind went back to an opening night at the Astor Theater in New York, many years ago. The play was "Paid in Full," starring Lillian Albertson in the greatest role of her career. I remember the next day the critics acclaimed you as one of Broadway's finest actresses. Having followed your brilliant career from that time until your retirement from the legitimate stage, it was with the deepest interest that I read your book.

Through a long career, I have interviewed innumerable young aspirants for the screen and, more recently, I toured the country searching for talent for my "Gateway To Hollywood" radio broadcasts. I interviewed many youngsters with the physical qualifications that would have justified their seeking a career in motion pictures or the legitimate stage, but, in nearly every instance, they lacked the very fundamentals of dramatic training. I wish that I might have had copies of MOTION PICTURE ACTING at the time so that I might have presented them to these aspirants for dramatic fame.

I believe your book will become a textbook in the various dramatic departments of colleges and schools, and will be studied with real profit by young players in the little theater groups and summer stock companies throughout the country. I heartily recommend it to anyone, regardless of age, who aspires to the screen or stage -- in fact, as I finished your book, it seemed to me that it can be read and studied most favorably by anyone who desires to improve his social grace and deportment.

I prophesy that MOTION PICTURE ACTING will have a wide circulation, and I congratulate you on your literary style and the selection of fascinating anecdotes of the theater which makes your book good reading for everyone.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Jesse L. Lasky". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.



Ben Piazza

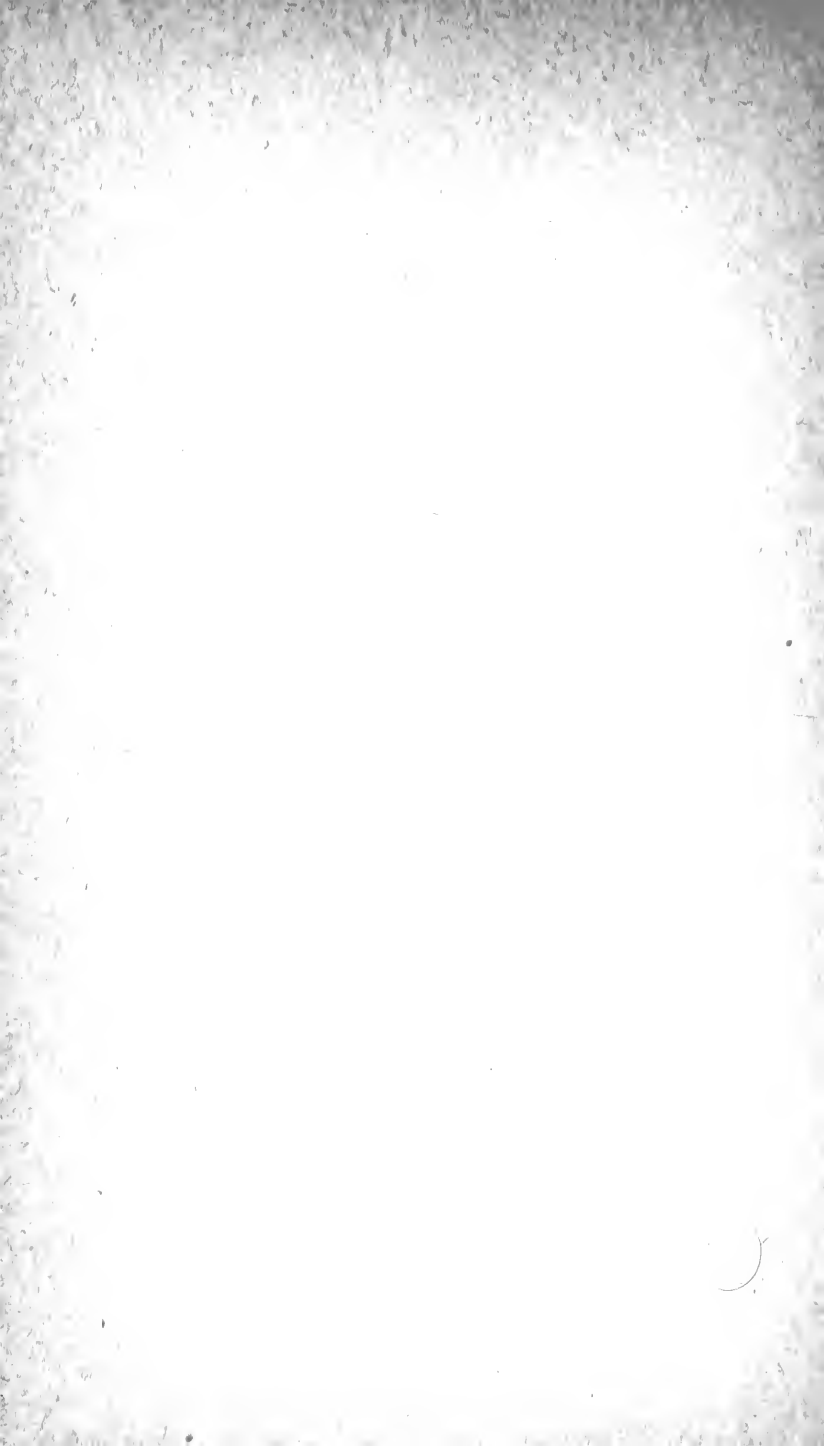
In all my years of experience in the theater and in Hollywood, I have never met anyone more fully equipped to teach the young actor and actress than you, Lillian Albertson. You have the particular genius not only of being a great - a very great - actress yourself, but of conveying the fine technique of your art in words. And that is why your book, *MOTION PICTURE ACTING*, is, in my opinion, a "must" for everyone interested in dramatics, and in general self-improvement.

You have a rich reservoir of experience to pass on to others, and you do it so ably in this book. I am thinking of your fine background of stardom in your great success, "Paid in Full." Later you became one of the most famous women theatrical producers in the country, and it was during this time that you started Clark Gable on his road to fame in your stage production of "The Last Mile." During the last five years it has been my privilege to watch your wonderful coaching at RKO Studio of all the young players on the lot, and I have seen such stars as Barbara Hale, Jane Greer, Bill Williams, and Paule Croset develop under your tutelage.

The Talent Scouts and Casting Directors can find them, but our work is fruitless unless they are coached in the fundamentals of acting by you. Through the combined knowledge of stage and screen technique you have originated a new method of teaching motion picture acting which is a most important contribution in our field. Many screen stars could read *MOTION PICTURE ACTING* with a great deal of profit.



Casting Director,
RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.

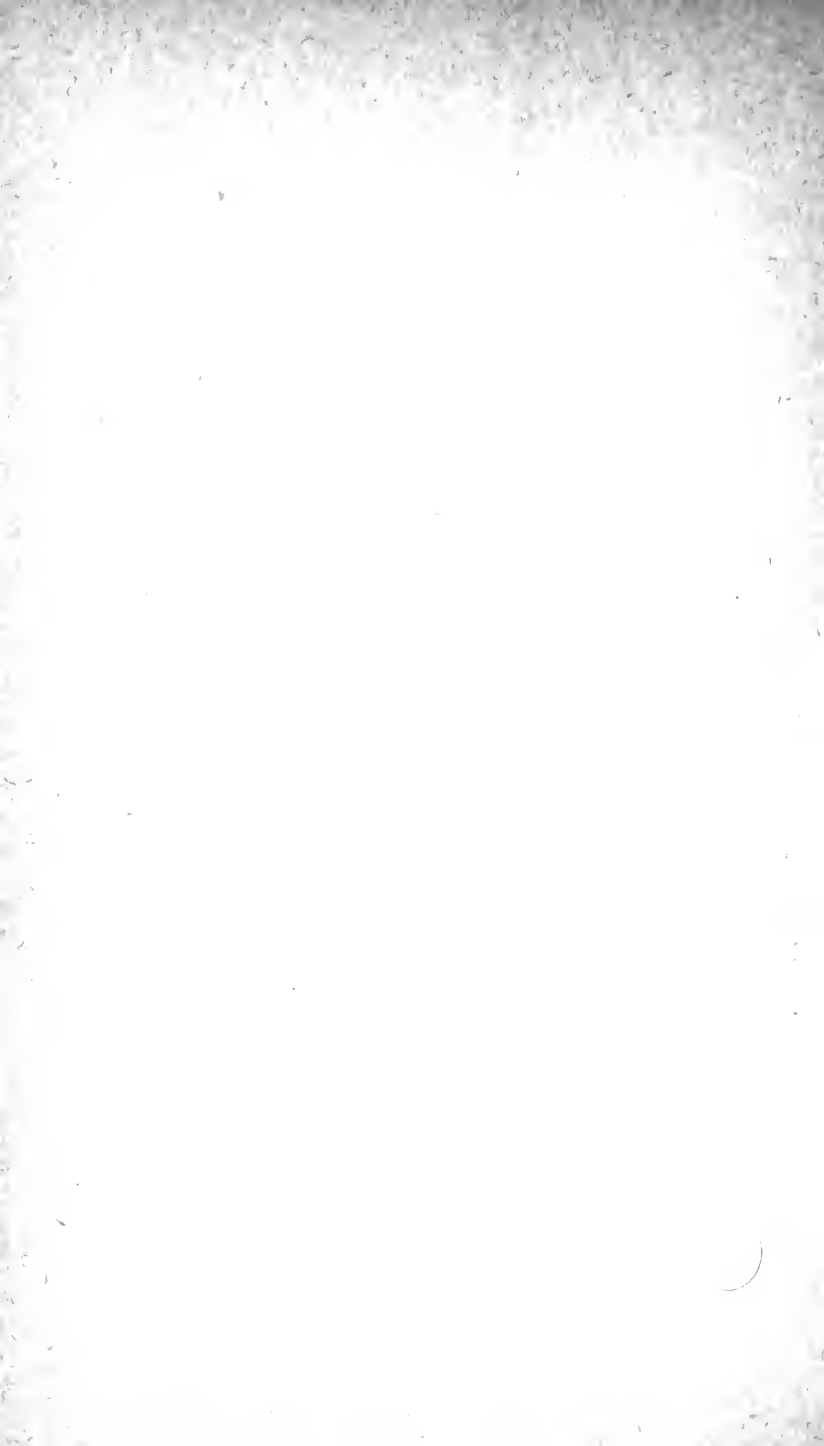


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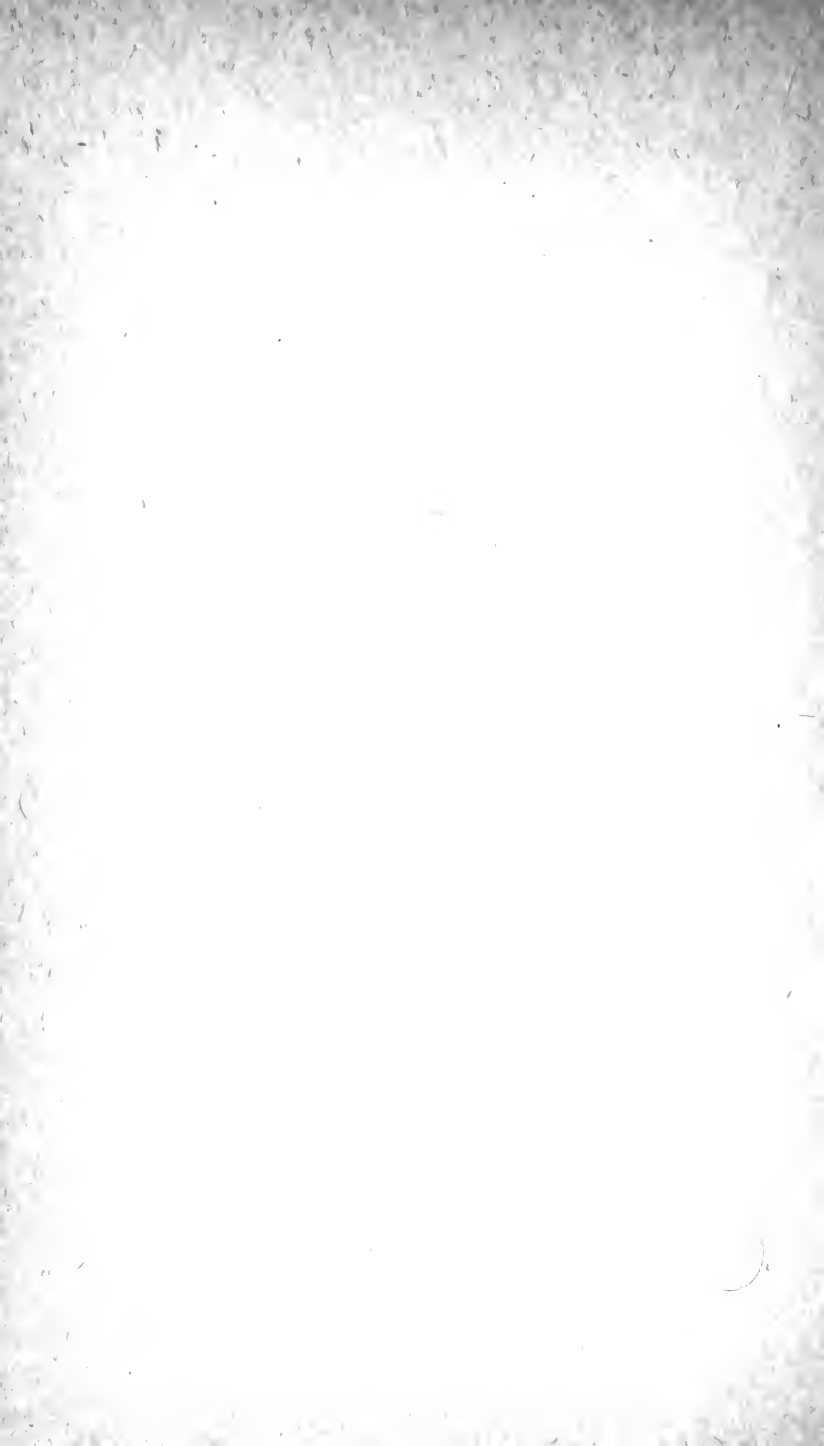
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MOTION PICTURE ACTING



Similarities and Dissimilarities in Stage and Screen Acting

So—you want to be an actor, do you?

WHY?

Don't tell me. Let me guess.

Perhaps you want to be an actor for the very good reason that you honestly believe you have what it takes.

If there *is* such a conviction, may I express the pious hope that you are right in your belief and that you do have the talent and the physical equipment, plus the stamina to see it through? If you have, then I say: Go to it—and may the good Lord bless and prosper you.

If, on the other hand, you have over-estimated your ability, your personal attractiveness, and your capacity to take it!—if you are thinking of the actor's as a soft life, all glamour, publicity, and the adulation of the multitude—well then, *that* is some-

thing on which you had better be set straight, right away.

You will get publicity, plenty of it; and I can guarantee that the autograph hounds will be on your trail, morning, noon and night *if* you make good; but, as for *glamour* . . . ?

In my experience, no truly gifted actor or actress of either stage or screen has ever found much flavor or sustenance in that word. In fact, I've never heard *one* even mention it; but actors, in motion pictures especially, could tell you a lot about hard work, sweat—yes, and a few tears thrown in.

It isn't particularly "glamorous" to be aroused at six o'clock in the morning, hurry to the studio for make-up at seven or seven-thirty, and arrive on the set ready for work at nine. Usually, after ten hours or more on the job, they can count on finishing the day by six (providing, of course, they don't have to work that night) and then they are free to go home for a late dinner. After that, if they can keep their eyes open, they may have a few minutes to get acquainted with their families before they retire to study their scenes for the next day and snatch a few hours sleep.

No, not exactly a soft life!

Oh, I'm not saying it isn't all worth it. If you have an ounce of greatness in you, you'll love it!

STAGE AND SCREEN ACTING

Even while you gripe at the hours and the terrible life you're leading, you will know in your heart that you wouldn't change places with any king or queen on earth.

But are *you* willing to work that hard, and stick to it through all the bitter disappointments and heartaches until you get to the top?

"Sure!" you may say, "Who wouldn't be when you think of all the money they make?"

A few actors do earn fabulous salaries. But for every one who does, there are hundreds who have never in their lives made more than a meagre living out of it and, unfortunately, never will.

If it's money and a soft life you are looking for, if that is your principal or your *only* reason for wanting to be an actor, *don't try it!* You won't get either *and* you don't deserve to.

There is still another type, and their name is legion. They come to us, clamoring at the gates of every studio in Hollywood, in all their pitiful unfitness. They come from all over the country, with no educational or cultural background, not to mention personal appearance or talent, with nothing that ever should have beguiled them for an instant into believing they have anything whatever to offer to the motion picture industry.

Too often, an infatuated friend or a doting parent

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fans the inflated ego of some cheaply pretty girl or some strapping, addle-pated young man and, without a thought of trying to prepare themselves, or any real idea of what acting *is*, they set out for Hollywood.

These are exhibitionists, pure and simple.

Yes, yes, I know. Some pretty good actors and actresses are exhibitionists, too, and maybe not so pure and simple either. But let's face it, *they have something to exhibit.*

You all know the type I mean. They are the life of every party. They take the center of the floor and "entertain" until those with low sales resistance shout, "You oughta be in pictures!" That makes it unanimous. And California, here they come!

Let us not be too light-hearted about it though. Far too often, some enterprising gentleman (who wouldn't know an actor if he saw one, but nevertheless wants to become an actor's agent) takes these unpromising newcomers, whom no established agent would think of handling, under his wing and starts trying to "peddle" them to talent scouts and dramatic coaches. And here is where I come in.

If I have sounded a bit cynical and unsympathetic—*don't you believe it!* It is my job to interview new talent and listen to them read lines from scripts, but I can't help remembering that I was

young once, myself, and terribly frightened; and I like to believe that I have never sent one of them away hurt or humiliated, no matter how unattractive or lacking in talent they may have seemed to me.

The unkindest thing I could do, however, *and the greatest disservice to them*, as well as to the studio, would be to recommend them for a contract for no better reason than that I happen to like most young people and may be sorry for them.

I am convinced that no one should be aided and abetted in becoming an actor if there is not every reason to hope that person has at least an even chance for success.

Failure, in this business, is just too tough to take!

And the tragedy is, that so many times the one who has failed will go right on failing in an occasional part in some minor picture (and starving the rest of the time) until it is too late to start doing something else in which he or she might have succeeded in rounding out a contented and a useful life with three square meals a day.

Now that I've wagged that warning finger quite enough, let me cheerfully admit that no one realizes better than I that you won't let it discourage you, or dissuade you in the least.

You *still* want to be an actor, don't you?

All right, then, come on in—the water's fine!

But, before you take the plunge, let me try to provide you with some water-wings which, I hope, will help you keep afloat until you have at least found out how deep the water is.

As we go along, I shall try to make you see what acting *is*, and many of the things it *isn't*, especially what kind of acting is most effective in a motion picture. In that, I am not being unfaithful to my early love—the theater. *Acting is acting*, wherever you find it, whether on stage or screen. Timing, change of pace, naturalness, and ease of movement, are equally necessary in both fields of expression.

There are differences in stage and screen acting, however, and they are important ones. On the stage, the actor is seen in full figure. We see him that way *only*, from wherever we may be sitting in the theater; and that is the way we hear him too, *from a fixed distance*. That is called a "long shot" in a studio *and that is as much as we ever see or hear of an actor on the stage*. Our positions in the theater cannot be changed. We cannot climb up on the stage and watch every flicker of an eye-lash from a distance of three feet. We cannot walk around him while he is playing a scene and peer at him from every angle.

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But the CAMERA does that very thing. It comes up close to the actor, and registers every fleeting expression. This is called, logically enough, a "close shot." And when we see the scene projected on the screen, it will be as though we had stood but a couple of feet from him, and could look right through his eyes into his very soul.

The MICROPHONE is nothing more, in its more subtle uses, than an *eavesdropping ear*, set to catch every tiniest nuance. There is never any thought in a motion picture studio of that hypothetical man in the last row of the balcony who, actors in the theater are always being admonished to remember, has paid for his seat and has a right to hear. He will hear, all right—even whispers, if properly recorded in a motion picture. He will be made to hear, *not by the actor*, but through the amplification of sound from the projection booth. But there will be *perspective* between the low, whispered intimacies and the louder scenes, a far greater range than is possible on the stage.

Let no one tell you that "picture" acting is limited and confined. It just isn't so! The truth is, there are many acting devices that a player *must* employ on the stage, which he doesn't *have* to make use of in a picture. He must, figuratively, come to us over the footlights whereas, in a motion picture,

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the camera (the audience) goes to him. He must broaden his pantomime, his facial expression; he must project his voice in the theater. The volume he may use in a studio would barely reach the first row and, remember, *any effort to be heard* robs speech of just that much intimacy and delicacy.

We have simply become accustomed to the traditional aspects of the theater throughout the centuries. We have had to accept them or there could have been no drama. We sit there, entranced, while the hero tells his loved one how much he adores her; and all the time we have to believe that her stern old father—whom we can see through the open window, out there on the porch, *not ten feet away*—hasn't heard a word. But *we* heard him *seventy-five feet away!* We paid for our tickets and have a right to hear, regardless of the believability.

If this be treason, make the most of it. To my mind, motion picture acting is much freer from restricting conventions and the necessity for indulgence on the part of the audience than the stage ever was. The aim of acting in a picture is to be as real as the rock you sit on or the tree you lean against. But when it so often *is not*, it is phonier than the stage could ever be, because every false tone or expression will be so greatly magnified.

I shall try to keep what I have to tell you about

STAGE AND SCREEN ACTING

acting as down-to-earth and as non-technical as I can make it. My teaching and advice will apply equally to both media, stage and screen. I have stated the differences between them; but I want to stress the point that these are differences in degree, rather than in the eternal verities.

Above all, I promise not to wax "lyrical" and indulge in highfalutin phraseology that could only lead to confusion already inexcusably confounded.

I shall be content to leave the esoteric abracadabra, the mystical obfuscation, and the hocus-pocus "techniques" to those who have never practiced what they teach.

Exercise

Of course, I should prefer to start right off talking about acting, but before you begin thinking about that too much you should give some thought to the physical equipment with which to do it.

Good posture and graceful movement are possible only when your body is properly developed and under control. So, for a few minutes we shall discuss *exercise*.

Now, where girls are concerned, I never approve of too strenuous exercise. First, because most women are not built for it and second, because, even if they were, I just wouldn't care to see women looking like female wrestlers.

Naturally I do not include dancing, swimming, horseback riding, tennis, golf, and all other such sports, among those which have a tendency to make you too muscular. They are good for you and a lot of fun if you do not overdo them. But too much tennis can certainly overdevelop the forearm.

EXERCISE

I particularly like "stretching" exercises for all-around development of the body, especially for women.

Don't underestimate them for their seeming mildness. They are far more effective than the more strenuous stuff! I learned of them many years ago from an old man who had built himself up from a middle-aged wreck until, at seventy, he looked like an Adonis, at least from the neck down. (Alas, poor Yorick, I know of no way to rejuvenate old heads. *Just don't make faces* when you're young, that's all.)

Here are the really essential exercises for the legs and torso:

Lie flat on your back on your bed or on a rug if your bed is too soft. Without lifting your leg, point at the foot of the bed with your right toe as far as you can without straining, then with your right heel.

Do this five or six times. Then do the same thing with the left foot.

Then alternate right toe, left toe, right heel, left heel. Notice how this rocks your hips. It will be a good reducer if you do it on the rug.

Now place your hands on your abdomen and lift your head slowly, just high enough to feel how it tightens the muscles there; and let it down again

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just as slowly. This is marvelous for that "spare-tire" effect. *But do it slowly.*

Later you may continue the lift all the way to a sitting position. Work up to that gradually if you are not used to exercising. These two exercises will take care of your legs and torso, and are enough for all practical purposes. You'll find they are plenty strenuous if you do them right.

Note: *Never* do any exercise more than six times in the beginning, less if it tires you. Remember, you are not trying to develop bulging muscles. All any girl should want is a flat tummy, a firm, rounded body, a straight back, and a sense of well-being.

If your legs need further developing, however, try this well-known squatting exercise. From a standing position, with your hands on your hips, rise up on your toes and spread your knees as you squat. Come back to a standing position slowly. In fact, *all exercises* are better for your health and will do more for you if *done slowly*. It is stress and leverage that count.

If it is your arms which need developing: extend them, palms up, shoulder high, straight in front of you. Close your fists and pull toward your chest with a long, steady pull. Imagine you are pulling against powerful resistance.

EXERCISE

If your bust is undeveloped or sagging, spread your arms in front of you level with your shoulders and bring the tips of your thumbs and fingers together. Your elbows should be out, your palms well apart, and your fingers quite stiff and pushing against each other. Spring your palms as close together as you can, release, and repeat.

Take a look in the mirror and see how this pulls up the muscles supporting the breasts.

As I have said, these simple exercises are not original with me, nor are they new. They are merely a few which I have found, through personal experience, to be ample for any woman's needs.

As for the heavier exercises for men—specific instruction on that is a little out of my line. I can tell you this, though. You had better not come to Hollywood looking like a wet dish-rag! This is a business where men must, at least, *look* like men. You never know when you will be called upon to play the dashing athlete, in no more than swimming trunks.

Now don't remind me that Gary Cooper or Jimmy Stewart would probably not have been exactly Michelangelo's idea of a model for his "David." *They are Gary Cooper and James Stewart* and you still have some distance to go to deserve their immunity from rules and specifications.

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Wherever you live, you undoubtedly have a gymnasium in your town. Go to it, and pull weights, skip rope, punch the bag, learn to box.

If you are down on the farm, pitch hay!

At any rate, pitch in! And make a man of yourself.

Posture and Movement

All that anyone would ever need to know about posture could be written on the back of a postage stamp. I wonder how many times I've said that.

Of course it isn't actually true, any more than are most clichés, mine included.

I think what causes me to indulge in this one is that it makes me so impatient for the simplest and most elementary part of an actor's training to be turned into a project.

As a people, we Americans are the "lesson-takingest" folk on earth! We seem to think that if we just take lessons enough that will do the trick. *Posture simply does not call for months of teaching!* You should be *told* about it and the *result* is up to you.

Oh, I do not mean to say I would not supervise and nag you a bit if you were here, but I would

expect you to do your own work and not expect me to keep charging your battery for you. It takes road-work to keep the one in your car up to par.

A good slogan to paste on your mirrors would be, "Fewer lessons—more practice!"

Now here are the essentials of good posture:

Try to make your abdomen and sacroiliac meet, not by pulling in your abdominal muscles alone (for that will only make your posterior protrude and give you a swayback) nor by just pulling in the tail of your spine. Pull them in *together*, as close together as you possibly can.

Try it and see how it throws your entire body into alignment.

Don't try to help out by *lifting* your *shoulders*. The feeling must be that of having them *thrust up*. You know the saying, "Pull in your stomach, stick out your chest, and throw back your shoulders"? Forget it unless you *want* a swayback.

I can promise you that you simply cannot stick out your stomach or round your shoulders and carry your head too far forward, like a camel looking over a fence, as long as you hold the posture I have described. Neither can you stick out your derriere.

So much for posture.

Now, let us go a bit further. Let up on the tension

POSTURE AND MOVEMENT

a trifle and walk with your arms hanging relaxed. They will swing like pendulums. Don't swing them. *Let* them swing. The only part of your body in which there should be the slightest tension will be in the abdomen and lower back.

Choose some not too busy street with plenty of plate glass shop windows and take a stroll. Watch your reflection. (No one will ever guess you are not looking at the merchandise.) See if you are using too much knee action. Or perhaps you are not using enough and are walking stiff-legged. Either way you should know enough to criticize yourself. You've seen people who move along with a nice easy glide. Try to do it yourself. If you are jerking your knees, like a horse with string-halt, can't you see how you look?

And do you know what you do about it? *You quit doing it—that's what you do!*

If you are walking as though your legs had splints around the knees, limber them up, and watch to see how much you need to bend them to make them look graceful and human. Very little, you'll find.

Keep on walking, checking on yourself, and trying to do it better. Don't spread your legs too wide apart. They should slide past each other, as close as possible without your knees knocking.

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As you pass an entrance to a shop there will most likely be other glass windows set at an angle to the street, and in them you can catch your reflection full face.

Look at your feet. Do you turn them out until you're splay-footed? Or, on the contrary, are you pigeon-toed? If you are either the one or the other, *quit walking that way!* You don't expect me to do more than tell you about it, do you? I can no more actuate any part of your body for you than I can articulate your words.

Straighten your feet, and keep them slanted from each other, but very slightly, in the narrowest possible V. *And that means thinking about the problem and seeing to it that you translate that thought into action.*

Correcting your faults of posture and movement *is not easy. But you are the only person on earth who can do it.* So get busy and work at it! I assure you *you'll need to work at it* every time you move across your own room. This isn't something to be done once in a while, but *all the time* until it becomes as natural as breathing.

Remember not to be stiff and jerky in walking. Don't jiggle along, lurch from side to side, or flounce up and down. Make your gait smooth, rhythmical.

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And you will get no mechanical aids from me, my friend, such as *walking with a book on your head*. What are you going to do when you're out on the street? You would look pretty silly with a heavy dictionary in place of a hat. Now, wouldn't you?

The main objection to that *book* idea, aside from its being unnecessary and too mechanical, is that it is a feat of *balancing* more than anything else. It isn't easy to keep a flat surface from sliding off a round one and the whole body becomes alert, trying to keep the book in place, so your arms, shoulders, and legs take on the appearance of a juggler's, whether you are conscious of it or not. Learn to carry yourself properly without any mechanical aids whatever.

Don't flop into a chair! Sit down. Don't slump! But don't sit like a ramrod, either. You can watch yourself in a mirror in your own room. Do it and keep on doing it until you can sit down like a civilized being. Then sit quietly. No foot-tapping. Let your hands rest idly in your lap or on the arms of the chair. If you are a girl, you will look better and will keep your hips on a more even keel if you don't cross your legs. Cross your feet instead. Or better still, keep both feet on the floor close together, with the heel of one snuggled against the instep of the other.

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Walk about your room from object to object, pick up something—a book or magazine—and examine it, read a few lines, then put it down and move on to something else. Do this until you lose that stiff, self-conscious feeling. But do everything you do without the feeling that you are giving a *performance*. Make it *mental*—not *mechanical*.

Start across the room and, with no apparent premeditation, imagine someone has called you. Stop in your tracks and turn back to the imaginary person. Let him catch you with the right foot just taking a step and then the left. It should not matter to you in the least which foot is in advance when the call comes. Don't make a "performance" out of it! *Think* and do it spontaneously. You wouldn't fumble around deciding which foot to use or how to turn if it actually happened, so why do it when you're acting?

The trick is *not to think of mechanics* but of *what the person wants*.

Learn to use your body gracefully, naturally, and form a habit of doing it all the time. Then you can forget it and *think the part*.

Get out of your mind, "*How* am I doing?" and substitute, "*What* am I doing?" You are turning to answer someone who has addressed you, aren't you? Then turn with the sole thought of "What does

this person want of me?" and your body will do its part. *If you'll let it.*

I am often asked, "What do I do with my hands?"

Well, I can tell you what I told Clark Gable when he was a young actor playing in my theatrical productions here in Los Angeles at the very beginning of his career. He had been told by the star of one of these productions that his hands were too big and that he didn't know how to use them at all. The star told him to stick his hands in his pockets, or take hold of his coat lapels, and do various other stilted and nonsensical things.

Of course I told Clark to do nothing of the kind; that his hands were exactly right for his big, husky body; and that he must not let anyone put any foolish ideas in his head about "hand technique" because there just wasn't any such thing! (I've grown to almost hate the word "technique" as applied to acting—it has been perverted to give a name to such a lot of phony teaching.)

I repeated what I had already said to Clark about the use of his hands: *Use them whenever you want to and in any way that expresses what you're thinking—that is, if the movement, or the inspiration to use them, stems from the feeling in the scene then use them. But don't let your hands use*

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you! Hands are made to hang at the ends of our arms when we, ourselves, are at ease, but they are not chained there! We can use them if we want to but it must be done with authority, simply because we feel like emphasizing a point. No futile waving them around, thrusting them into pockets to get rid of them, or hanging onto coat lapels.

That was as much as Clark Gable, who was a "natural," a *born* actor, and as easy as an old shoe almost from the very start twenty years ago, ever needed to be told about the use of his hands. In fact, *that's all there is to tell!* I encouraged him to feel that they were *his*, to be used as he pleased, and that no one, not even the distinguished star who was trying to help him, could tell him *how*. I knew better than to even try.

I'm tempted to interrupt the lesson with a little incident about Clark and that "hand-business." He had had more trouble with them in the beginning than with any other part of him but before the star I've mentioned made him conscious of them all over again, he had really become quite natural and easy in his gestures and movements. Just knowing that the star was watching and criticizing him was enough to make him feel awkward and amateurish, and here is what happened on the opening night.

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The third act of the play was in a rustic garden with an old-fashioned well, surrounded by a circular stone wall, in the center of the set.

Clark had come on in a stiff straw hat of the Gay Nineties and he kept juggling the thing from one hand to the other, finally depositing it on the wall. The next minute, in his nervousness, he struck it and knocked it into the well. Of course, instead of making a deep, cavernous splash, it hit the bare floor, only two feet below, with a resounding whack that echoed through the theater. The audience howled, and poor Clark got purple with embarrassment.

It just goes to show what calling attention to an actor's hands can do to him when the actor himself is trying to forget them.

After an actor has finally achieved ease of movement and expression his hands will correspond exactly to his mood. Many actors use their hands a great deal. Others, and equally good actors, very little. But it cannot be emphasized too strongly, it is the *mood* which must determine the use. Hands must be free to respond to whatever the actor is *thinking*.

To gain that control, hands should be freed from too much *awareness*; and the best way to do that is to practice sitting with your hands perfectly re-

laxed for extended periods until you forget you have any. Walk around with them *undisturbed* at your side.

Nothing is quite so revealing of the amateur as to see hands twitching and making those weak little scooping gestures with which beginners try to help themselves get expression into their lines. In actual life, their hands would be quiet if their owners were well-poised and not excited or tense about something.

If you find you are self-conscious and think too much about the different members of your body in your personal life, practice giving the person to whom you are talking your undivided attention. Make yourself so interested in the conversation that you lose all thought of trying to *pose* your hands, your feet, or any part of your body. I guarantee that you will not only be forming a most necessary *habit of listening* but it will also *keep your mind off yourself* and you will no longer be so stiff and ill at ease.

I know it sounds simple in the telling. It isn't so easy to accomplish. But you *will* accomplish it if you have the thing within you that is ever going to turn you into an actor.

If you have not, it still can't hurt you to try to be a more poised, interesting companion. In fact,

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it will pay big dividends no matter what you eventually become. A graceful, natural handling of your body, a courteous, interested attention given to others, will help you win friends—*and keep them.*

Speech

The things I am about to say on the subject of speech will surely win *me* no friends among certain types of diction teachers and voice coaches. But with the strong convictions I hold on the speaking voice, I must run that risk.

Nothing I say here is meant to apply to the training of a *singer's* voice. That isn't my field. In contradistinction to the training of an *actor's* voice the training of a singer's requires a definite technique, although the teaching varies so greatly between the different schools of thought and the teachers themselves that one might well use the plural and call them "techniques."

But in spite of variations in method all of these techniques have certain aims in common, *breath control and voice-placement*—even though the teachers may quarrel a bit over how to achieve those ends.

A singer, of necessity, is voice-conscious first,

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last and all the time. I am not speaking so much of the "pop" singers, but those with highly-trained voices—*singers*.

To make my meaning clear, let us look at the respective purposes of *singing* and *speaking*. What does each attempt to do?

The ballad and classical singer is concerned above all else with the creation of beautiful tone. The lyrics, to be sure, tell a story, but it is set in poetical form within the further confines of musical form. Words are prolonged to fit certain notes to be sung, in total disregard for their importance of emphasis *or even of common sense, for that matter*. (Understand, I'm not objecting. That's just wonderful—for singing!)

This being true, the *singer's* voice must be trained to sustain tone arbitrarily, and breathing must be controlled to support a phrase in unbroken smoothness *for no reason whatever but the musical effect*.

But is that how a *speaker* would deliver those same poetical lines, where his entire concern is to convey their meaning, their rhythm, and their beauty of thought? It certainly is not.

The *speaker* would be giving expression primarily to *ideas*, unconfined by the hard and fast restrictions which music imposes, and he would

therefore be much freer although he would *still* have to remain within the framework of poetical form—*meter* and *rhyme*.

Now let us transpose the poem into *prose*. Now your speaker is freed completely. He is free to express ideas, unhampered by any musical or poetical restrictions whatever, either of tone, meter, tempo, or rhythm. If he *can* endow the lines with *beauty of tone*, so much the better, but he must make his appeal through reason without the sensuous assistance which music provides. *He must make sense*, whatever else he may, or may not, do.

In prose he is free to space his words as his thoughts dictate or rush them in a torrent where emotion quickens him. He may hesitate and cogitate, and thus make us believe the words he is speaking are his very own. He is *concentrated*—seeing and revealing to us his mental pictures. *That is acting!*

Let but one trace of *voice-consciousness* rear its ugly head and away goes illusion, and we go to sleep. I know of no potion more soporific than a rich, sonorous speaking voice revelling in its own mellow, luscious tones.

I heard one such a few weeks ago on the radio. The man, who shall be nameless here, was speaking from New York on a national hook-up.

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For the first minute or so, I thought I had never heard a more beautiful vocal organ in my life or more flawless diction. By the end of five minutes, I was ready to commit mayhem. I could not have told you what he was talking about. I'm not sure he knew, himself.

Voice-conscious? That man was indulging in a perfect orgy of mellifluous sound, and treading his way through a field of words as though he were walking on harebells.

I found myself praying he would make just one little slip . . . one tiny error . . . and when he didn't, in sheer exasperation, I tuned him out.

And yet, no one anywhere is more enamored of a lovely voice *saying something* than I. It is only when a speaker practices the singer's art on me that I become venomous.

You can't tell me that some old-time Shakespearian actor, turned diction-teacher, had not trained that man. Or maybe it was some singing teacher, thinking only of voice production. I just know that no man could have done all that by himself!

Here is why I think it dangerous to train a speaking voice with the same methods that are necessary for the singer: Actors are so apt to become *voice-conscious elocutionists* under that training. They are likely to become too involved in

breath control and voice^a production to be able to think of anything else.

Perfect diction, yes! But Heaven preserve us from the speaker or actor who seems to sample every word before he utters it and labors over every syllable until he reminds us of a horse gathering itself for a hurdle, simply because he fears he may come a cropper over some inelegancy of speech.

Of course, he must not say, "I saw ut," but need he come to a full stop and figuratively gird his loins before that final pronoun? Not if he has the brains to work on his English and learn to say, "I saw it," with no thought of guarding against an atrocity.

Do you remember what I said about walking on the street and around your room, learning to handle your body and limbs easily and naturally, and then forgetting to think of them at all?

Well, that's the way you learn to speak good English. You work at it all the time until you can speak without having to remember to be careful.

First, if you do not already own one, go out and buy yourself a dictionary and keep it beside you when you read. If you don't know them, learn your diacritical markings—but thoroughly. That is, if you are using an old-fashioned dictionary.

I think it only fair to tell you that there are such

dictionaries which leave me completely baffled. I'm not sure whether I am just stubborn by nature and have refused, through sheer perversity, to memorize all those amazing hieroglyphics, or if it is that I am merely lazy and have never taken the trouble to learn them. Anyway, why do things the hard way? There *are* dictionaries with a minimum of diacritical symbols—and learning the simpler ones will not tax anyone.

The Funk & Wagnalls *New College Standard Dictionary*, for instance, indicates pronunciations by a simple spelling of the words the way they sound. No longer should innocent little children be taught to read, "*A* dog bit *a* man," when the sound of the indefinite article "A" is authoritatively given its rightful pronunciation as a short, unobtrusive *uh*. No more, "*The* cat ran up *the* tree," when it is actually, "*Thuh* cat ran up *thuh* tree," in correct English speech.

I like the way they treat such words as *garage*. They give the first syllable as a short, quick "guh" and throw the whole stress and feel of the word into the "rahzh."

You will find this new dictionary much easier to understand. You will like the way they indicate emphasis by underlining the syllable to be stressed. In words where there is a secondary emphasis,

that syllable will be underlined as well, with an accent "tick" over the syllable to be more strongly stressed. Read those first twelve pages carefully before you rush on to "Aachen" and the "aardvark." You may not come out of it a better man or woman, but you will certainly emerge a wiser one.

Every time you come across a word which you cannot define or pronounce with certainty, look it up immediately. Write it down and use it in all its different meanings. Say it aloud in a dozen or so sentences until you have made it *your* word for keeps.

Watch out for, "Don't you?" and be sure you are not saying, "Donchu?"

See to it that you do not say, "I met 'im," when you should be saying, "I met him."

But look out for that full stop before taking the hurdle! Don't dwell on that final T in "don't you," "can't you," etc. I mean, don't *star* the letter. Articulate it cleanly but *without losing the flow*. Don't cut the two words apart. Say them together, just as is done in the slovenly "donchu" and "canchu." It is the same with "saw it," "did it," and all other such combinations. Get the feel that you are speaking one word of two syllables with the stress or accent on the first syllable, the verb. If you hesitate for even the slightest instant before enunciating the

“it” or the “you,” you will sound like a school boy or girl, or a Wendell Willkie. *There* was a brilliant man with a college education, yet he could never become on familiar terms with “it” for he was too afraid of saying “ut,” about which someone must have warned him. He used to square off and brace himself like a cagey wrestler before tackling that inoffensive pronoun.

Learn to say all the common words and phrases correctly without seeming to take the slightest pains. Use your best English on your family, on the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker! On everyone, all the time! Never let down.

Make correct speech a habit. And let me remind you of something which you probably know but seldom make use of: Our brains are criss-crossed by “habit-paths,” and good habits are *almost* as habit-forming and path-making as bad ones! If you have not made a habit of using correct speech *all the time* you will find yourself thinking of nothing but the fear of making a “slip” when you are under the nervous tension of trying to act. Make that good-speech-path so well trodden that you will stay on it without the slightest fear of getting lost in the jungle of sloppy diction.

And now, about that dreadful idea so many diction teachers promulgate in an effort to sound

“cultured.” I mean that horrendous pseudo-British accent so many of them teach.

On an Englishman that broad Italian A in *can’t* looks good. On an American it is a horrible misfit. It just does not jibe with the rest of our speech.

Oh, I know the dictionaries permit it and even give it preference—but remember, they are compiled for the entire English-speaking world. But if you are an American and don’t want to sound affected, you had better not use that broad sound of A except in those words which are never pronounced any other way, such as, *father*, *farm*, etc.

No American who speaks English as the mother tongue would ever make a mistake over the short sound of the letter A as in *cat* and the broad sound in *arm*. But I wonder how many of you are infallible when it comes to the A with one dot over it? That’s the one to learn thoroughly, à.

Do you make “can’t” rhyme with “rant?” Yes, so do a lot of other people. Well then, that is something you must learn *not* to do. But in avoiding that flat, all-American mispronunciation of the word *can’t*, don’t commit the even worse offense of pronouncing it as though it rhymed with *taunt*. Don’t make it “cawn’t,” I beg of you!

There is a half-way sound of A between the two

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extremes, that A with one dot over it. The best way I can describe its sound is to tell you to start to say "ah," the way the doctor asks you to when he's trying to get a peek at your tonsils, but instead of opening your throat up wide, you close your jaws a trifle and bring the sound forward in your mouth.

That should give the correct à, and that is the one you should use in all those words such as *can't*, *after*, *pass*, *fast*, *grass*, *glass*, *ask*, *answer*, etc.

But enough of that. With the exception of *can't*—on which I won't budge an inch!—you will find all the other words in your dictionary just as I've given them to you. So look these up for yourself, and the many other words in daily use containing that particular sound of A. It is the one on which most people go wrong.

Now, let us talk about voice quality and how to improve it without making *voice-conscious elocutionists* out of you.

I would no more think of giving you a set of vocal exercises such as singers use, than I would give you hand, eye, or body "technique." My purpose is to make you *less* self-conscious in every way, not more so.

I have had many students who have studied singing and until I could break them of the habit they

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were continually asking me where certain tones came from.

Were they "chest tones" . . . "head tones"?

My answer is invariably, "None of your business!"

What I want is the warmth and depth of tone that only deep, warm thoughts can rightly give to an actor's voice. I won't have the mechanics of voice production stepping in between them and the lines they are speaking!

I've often told such students to get their minds off the working of their *diaphragms* and *vocal chords* and give their *imagination*s a chance to work.

They've asked me many times, "When do I breathe?"

Holy Thespis! Can you ever remember a time when you were pleasantly engrossed in what you were saying to someone and ran out of breath? Not unless you had sinus trouble, a bad cold, or some pulmonary ailment, or had been running or taking some other violent exercise.

It is the business, the subconscious business, of your lungs to supply you with all the breath you need *and they will attend to their business if they are not interfered with physically, or mentally.*

If, of course, the role calls for great mental dis-

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tress or excitement, you should *not* sound as though you were breathing normally. And if you are *thinking the part*, you won't be! Your breathing will take on the character of the scene. The lungs will instinctively do their work *if you will only leave them alone*, physically and mentally.

Think the part, and your lungs will take care of the breathing!

Where the speaking voice has a nasal twang and lacks resonance I tell you to linger on the M's and N's in their various combinations with all of the vowels, but *never*, under any circumstance, to treat these resonant sounds as something apart. They must *always* be used in *word combinations*, such as in *and*, *men*, *in*, *on*, and *under*. You will find hundreds of such combinations of A, E, I, O, U, with M and N. No going to a piano and *humming* up and down the scale! *Use those resonant tones in speech!*

Making unrelated singing tones is no more effective for developing a good speaking voice than walking with a book on your head will improve your gait when the book is removed.

Leave singing to the singers!

Let me give you an idea of what I mean this way. You have often heard some girl sing on the radio like a velvet-throated lark and then the an-

nouncer for the soap-company sponsor will step to the mike and gush, "Miss Brown, I'm sure this audience will be interested to know that your exquisite skin is just as lovely as your glorious voice!"

That is her cue to break in with, "Oh, thank you, Mr. Jones! That's because I always use Blankity-Blank Soap!" And if her speaking voice, more often than not, isn't as flat and colorless as the ring of a counterfeit silver dollar, then we don't listen to the same radio programs.

There is, of course, no reason why singers should *not* have pleasant speaking voices and, by the same token, no reason why they *should*, any more than anyone else. *The point is, that singing just does not do the trick for the speaking voice*—unless you are willing to settle for the cultivated phoniness of the pipe-organ quality of the man I described on the radio.

You will find that as you practise a less flat pronunciation of words, the whole tone of your speech will greatly improve. Treat the English language gently, lovingly!

But here is something to which you had better pay close attention: Our voices reflect *us*—*what we really are, inside of us*. If, after we have done all we can to improve them, there still remains a harsh

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quality, or one that is petulant and whiny, it may be because we, ourselves, are either ill-tempered or petulant whiners. No "practicing" will ever reach *that* condition, *the change must come from within!* We've got to stop *feeling* mean or aggrieved, or *it will crop out in our voices, no matter what we do!* This is a *mental* condition. So, be honest with yourself and, if it hits you, *try being a little more pleased with yourself and the rest of humanity. . . . Don't complain! . . . Force yourself to take a more cheerful outlook, and watch what it will do for you. . . .*

Now, back to what you can do on the physical side. Read aloud ten minutes or more every day and listen to your voice. See if those M's and N's won't give you a deeper, more mellow, resonant quality (don't force, leave your throat open and perfectly relaxed) but don't, as you hope to be an actor, ever do this vocal experimenting in connection with any role! If you do, that is all anyone will ever hear in those lines—nice voice production and no meaning. *You simply cannot play with your voice and think the role at the same time!*

After all, how *beautiful* does a speaking voice have to be? Can you tell me, off-hand, whether it is the beautiful *quality* in the voice of your favorite actor or actress which interests you, or *just the*

way that person uses it to express his or her every emotion? Isn't it, in fact, the warmth and beauty of thought, and the variety, coloring the words they speak?

A final warning—don't try every absurd idea you hear about! I suppose you have heard the publicity stories about the young actress who was sent out into the hills to scream her head off in order to lower her voice and make it more "sexy"? (Of course, I never believed a word of it, that girl is too smart and so is the director who was supposed to have sent her.)

I can't imagine any better way of taking the velvet off a voice and making it coarse, hoarse, and undependable, like that of an adolescent boy whose voice is changing. *Henry Aldrich* doesn't sound particularly sexy, *neither do hog-callers*.

Regional Accents

Here is something further on the subject of speech, omitted from the article under that heading because it is not of such general application as are the other rules laid down there. This is specifically for those with regional accents.

Your aim should be to speak a brand of English which will never suggest that you have come from any particular section of the country.

If you are from the Midwest, get rid of that Hoosier twang and flat pronunciation of your words. I was born in Indiana and grew up in California so I can speak freely and *feelingly* on that one.

If you are from the deep South, lose that delightful Southern accent—but fast! And Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and points south by west: Much as I love some of your citizens, I shudder when they say, “Inyway, Ah saw the min whin they came to mah hauoos.” Mind you, I wouldn’t say a word if it were not for the fact that,

if they have all the other qualifications, I may have to spend months teaching them not to do that when they come to Hollywood.

If you are from Boston, don't say, "I'm going to the park in my cah," when you're really going to the park in your car.

We'll leave Brooklyn and Noo Joisey out of this.

If there is no one around who can help you lose those accents, then learn the way I did when I came to New York as a young actor, after one year in a stock company in San Francisco; that is, by listening to those who speak better English than you do. Don't tell me there is no one to teach you! *You can hear them on the radio every day, if nowhere else.*

I had been raised in the West and knew I had much to learn. And my first lesson was given me quite inadvertently by Aubrey Boucicault, son of the famous actor-playwright, Dion Boucicault.

Aubrey and I were playing the young leads in the all-star cast of "The Prodigal Son" at the New Amsterdam Theatre; and one day at rehearsal, he asked me how long I had played "out West" before coming to New York.

I said, "How did *you* know I came from the West?"

He stammered: "Why . . . why, I suppose you must have told me."

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I said, "Yes, I *told* you, all right—but it was the way I pronounced some word! What was it?"

I tried to make him understand that I was not in the least offended and would consider it a great favor to be told. When I had finally convinced him, he said, "Well, you spoke of having played in a 'stawk' company. . . ."

I replied, innocent as a lamb, "Of course, I did—but I didn't say *where*."

And then he let me have it. There was no need to tell him *where*. It was the way I'd said that word "stock" that had tipped him off.

I persuaded him to make a little bargain with me—every time he heard any of that western accent in my speech, he was to tell me. *And he certainly did.*

That handsome, clever young man, with the prematurely grey hair, has been dead these many years; but I shall never cease to be grateful to him.

It should suffice to say, *no regional accents*. They are not so bad if you are going on living amongst those who speak as you do—but the theater and pictures are for the *world*, not just the neighbors. And, unless you want to be *typed* and never play any but that kind of role, you had better learn to speak without telling us by your accent from what part of the country you have come.

I repeat: Listen to good speakers on the radio. Saturate your ears with the sound of correct English. Compare what you are hearing with the accents around you, so that you will know the difference, and practice.

There are many actors in the soap-operas, as well as the top-notch announcers, who speak an excellent brand of English—far better than some of our well-known commentators, and Senators from Washington.

Imagination

Remember what Joyce Kilmer said about a tree? Well, you can say the same thing about an actor—*only God can make one.*

I have been accused of having done it, but I deny it. And I'm willing to deny it on behalf of all those who might be inclined to let the accusation stand—and take a few bows, besides.

I agree that good directors, and dramatic coaches who know their business, can help enormously, but they've got to have an ACTOR to start with.

If the Lord of Creation has failed to supply the peculiar talent which permits one to *think* acting, all the teaching on earth will go for naught.

And what are the signs and portents of that talent?

The psychoanalysts have a word for it, *identification.*

Can you seem to identify yourself with another person? Seem to think as he would think; react as

he would, in a given situation? In other words, have you a vivid IMAGINATION?

You have? Now, before you begin to pack, let me give you a few hard facts.

You must be imaginative or you will never become an actor, but just remember this: The asylums are full of poor, befuddled inmates who have the greatest imaginations to be found anywhere—that's why they are there. They live in a world of unreality, peopled by creatures out of their own mad dreams.

So, a *vivid imagination*, taken by itself, can't be the answer, can it?

No, it certainly cannot!

So much depends on the form your imagination takes and what you do with it.

You have heard about "living the part," haven't you? Well, maniacs do just that. *They identify themselves completely with the roles in which their own disordered brains have cast them, and live those roles up to the hilt.*

Actors do not live parts. They merely seem to live them . . . and what a vast difference there is between those two concepts.

Some of the most outrageous and maudlin performances I have ever seen have been perpetrated by actors so swamped in the slough of their own

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soggy emotions that tears spattered like rain over their palpitating bosoms.

Shades of Melpomene, how they suffered!

But the idea was to make the *audience* suffer, and to suffer the pangs and tribulations of the character being portrayed. I only suffered for the *actor* and my grief was for his bad taste and lack of control.

Shakespeare said it first, in Hamlet's advice to the players, and better than any poor words of mine:

"O, it offends me to the soul to hear some robustious periwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags . . . I would have such a fellow whipped for o'erdoing Termagant . . ."

Well, I can't say that I advocate the whipping-post exactly, but I do reserve the right to walk out on the offender.

But let us see what else Shakespeare had to say about control and good taste in acting.

"Be not too tame, neither, but let your own discretion be your tutor: suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature . . ."

No vocal, hand, or body technique in that! Let the *mood* dictate the voice, gesture and movement . . . be free from restraint . . . but through it all runs a strong admonition to keep a firm, intellec-

tual grip on the emotions that will keep you from turning pathos into bathos.

Shakespeare makes acting just what it is, *mental* as all get out! No letting imagination run wild, but always held in check. *There must be a rider in control of that raging steed if it is to win any races!*

Now, it's easy to illustrate to a student by voice and action what I mean by the difference in *living* a part and *seeming* to live it. It is rather difficult to convey in cold print. But that is what I must try to do, else these words of mine might as well be about the bees and the flowers—an allegory, full of mystic symbolism.

First, let us look at this thing IMAGINATION. How far should it be allowed to dominate an actor, and what is its sane, healthy use?

To my mind, it is sheer nonsense to ask anyone to try to imagine the unimaginable. It is a travesty on teaching! What I mean is, the crazy notion that human beings can be taught to imagine themselves to be inanimate objects—such as: “a bubble-bath,” “a candle in the wind,” or “a lovely pearl, at the bottom of the ocean, beset by all the terrors of the deep . . .” and, as I live, those are the very words a famous dramatic coach used to one of her girl students in putting over her conception of what constitutes *imagination*!

IMAGINATION

That sort of thing is utter nonsense, high-sounding buncombe.

I will admit it impresses some of the defenseless young things, so eager to learn, with its impenetrable profundity. But how much saner it would be to tell them, that instead of trying to actually think of *themselves* as “a bubble-bath,” that it would be better to visualize the *scene* as gay, and—if you want to be fanciful—as light and airy as an iridescent soap bubble dancing in the sun. And the *character* must conform with the spirit of the scene. That puts no strain of impossible imagery in their minds, and keeps them from sloshing around in a *mental bathtub* when they should be thinking of, and reacting to, the person with whom they are talking.

“A candle in the wind?” Wouldn’t it be less confusing to say, “The character you are playing is wavering, indecisive, and easily blown hither and yon by every doubt and fear?” That should certainly be “windy” enough!

And “a lovely pearl at the bottom of the ocean, etc?” Well, why not say, “You are a lovely, pure young girl, frightened and alone, in a very desperate situation?”

But all that would sound too normal and easy to understand, I suppose.

I cannot resist the temptation to relate a little story, a story told me by a friend of the victim—and *victim* is right; for the girl, who had been ill and was still very nervous, nearly had a breakdown over the encounter.

It seems she had never met her distinguished teacher (her only contact having been with the impressive secretary) and was waiting with several other solemn-faced young students, when the door flew open and a strange, grimly purposeful figure sailed in—straight at her!

Seizing the girl by the wrist and dragging her to her feet, the lady proclaimed, in that inimitable voice, "*I am a horse! You are a bird! Now, how does a bird talk to a horse?*"

The poor girl thought a mad woman had invaded the premises. She leaped back, emitted one shrill shriek, and fled.

It would be nice to relate that the girl regretted her frantic scramble and went back and learned to talk like a bird—and to a horse yet—because it would be quite a trick if she could do it. But she didn't. She felt she was lucky to get out of there, and I'm afraid she was right.

My, oh my—what a field day Shakespeare would have had with such poseurs!

Instead of advocating a whip, I will content my-

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self with saying, in the milder words of the immortal bard, *Pray you, avoid them*. They are, I suspect, more intent on confounding and confusing you into interminable courses than they are in teaching. Avoid them as you would quack doctors—purveyors of magic concoctions, guaranteed to cure anything from cirrhosis to chilblains. (I often wish I *had* some magic formula that could turn young people into actors over night, or ever in this life for that matter, but there is, alas, no such remedy.)

Let us get back to imagination of the sane, healthy kind—the kind you must possess if you're to be an actor.

You have heard of “developing imagination,” haven't you?

Well, I tell you that you cannot *develop* imagination, in the sense of acquiring *more*. You learn to *use* what you *have*! And you are “stuck” with *that particular type of imagination, or the lack of it*!

In the great composers, images in the brain take the form of magnificent harmonies. These are *heard in the realm of the imagination* before they are ever set down on paper or performed on any instrument. But could the greatest composer of them all ever develop in me, for instance, the power to *imagine* beautiful melodies which I had not first heard

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played or sung? I assure you, he could not, because I completely lack the capacity for *creative musical thinking*. I can only *remember*.

And I don't mind telling you that Einstein himself could not develop a *mathematical sense* in me! I simply cannot *imagine* mathematics—for *me*, it is well-nigh *unthinkable*. Oh, I can keep my check book straight and figure my income tax, but that about does it. I just do not possess the peculiar *type* of imagination that could ever permit me to *develop* into a mathematician.

But let us not be too humble. With all Einstein's great gift, I'm willing to bet he would make a terrible actor! He, undoubtedly, does not possess *acting* imagination. You see, great talent—genius, if you like—usually comes singly, unless one happens to be a Leonardo da Vinci. It is quite enough to have *one* talent and the one we are interested in is ACTING.

Now, how does one go about learning to *use* acting imagination?

Through CONCENTRATION. But that deserves a chapter by itself, *for concentration is the keystone of the arch*. Without it, the whole edifice comes tumbling down.

Concentration

Through *concentration* you learn to *use* the creative acting imagination, and concentration is something that *can be developed*. I should put it more strongly than that. *Concentration* is something that *must* be developed to the nth degree *or you simply cannot become an effective actor!*

Concentration enables you to shut out every thought but the scene and the character you are portraying and, in concentration, you develop the *mood* that must “color” every action and every word you speak.

Just to move gracefully and naturally and to read lines intelligently is not enough. You *will*, at least, move naturally, if not gracefully, and get every ounce of meaning out of your lines if your MOOD is what it should be.

I use a method that may sound strange, but I

promise you it works. It is actually a method of developing, through concentration, *mood-patterns* and the *voice-patterns* associated with each mood.

Pick up a magazine and turn to the advertising pages. The reason I stipulate ads is that they will not divert you from your purpose by their interesting content.

Read an ad over once with a simple, factual reading in order to get through with it and its meaning. Then forget *entirely* the meaning of the words.

Now read it aloud, no matter what the words say, as though it were the most annoying statement you ever saw! *Concentrate*. Be annoyed! Sound annoyed!

Read it next with all the sadness you can muster. (We will say more about this business of developing pathos later.)

Read it also as though it were the most absurd thing you ever heard of! Belittle it! Be sarcastic!

Read it gayly, merrily—as though it amused you no end!

Do you see what I am getting at? I am trying to make you see that it isn't just *words*, it is the *mood* that counts.

Spoken words mean practically nothing unless mood colors them.

Don't be put off the idea because it sounds silly.

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You must put aside your sense of the ridiculous and give yourself whole-heartedly to making words, *any words at all*, convey any emotion you wish them to—so much so, that someone in another room, unable to distinguish the words you are speaking, will think from your tone of voice that you are *angry, sarcastic, sad*, or *glad*, according to the tone you are using.

As your powers of concentration increase, you will be able *to turn mood on and off* as readily and as surely as you turn on a faucet and get water, and turn it off to stop the flow! Of course, this is on the assumption that you have a talent for acting—in other words, that you have *acting imagination*. If you have *not*, you will never quite know whether all this works or not, because, in that case, you won't be able to do it anyway. But don't sell yourself short—try it!

To become a great actor it is absolutely necessary to gain complete command of mood, to make it your obedient slave to do your every bidding.

I sometimes perform a little stunt for my students to illustrate what I mean by *mood induced by concentration*. In this case, it happens to be the mood of pathos.

I choose any object in my office—the telephone, the lamp, a chair, anything—and, while saying

the most absurd things about it, tears come into my eyes and run down my cheeks.

Now let us take this "stunt" apart and analyze it step by step. The first step is *concentration* in which I "plug-in" on the emotion I want to express. It is as though I were suddenly wrapped in an emotional cloud—a magnetic field—shutting out the world.

In the second step, the emotion conjured up in concentration will reveal itself in the tone of my voice. As I speak, the greatest excitant in the world keeps adding fresh fuel to the flames. *Nothing* so excites and moves us as does the human voice, our own voices included, and after a few short sentences, *no matter what the words*, I am in a state of pure emotion in which every physical manifestation of grief will be present.

As for the third step, the tears *are only an end-result—of no importance in themselves*. They merely *follow* as they would if I were using the saddest of words and giving expression to thoughts of the utmost pathos, just as they would if I were playing an emotional scene written by a great author.

And what is the point of all this for you? The point is, that if you can do this swift creation of *synthetic emotion*—and that is what *all* acting is—in what might be described as "cold blood," there

will never be *anything* that can distract you and turn you away from the “feel” of a scene. (I predict you won’t stay cold-blooded for long!) You will be assailed by no doubts—there will be no room for such disturbing thoughts when your whole being is surcharged with the dynamic emotional power of the scene you are playing. And make no mistake about it, I *am* playing a scene to that telephone, lamp, or chair.

I imagine the first step, *concentration*, is a bit like the sensation a mystic experiences when he “goes into the silence.” I am no “mystic,” but I know this—the ability to retreat into your own inner depths and to *feel* any emotion whatever, the instant you want to feel it, is the greatest protection from distracting influences that any actor can have.

Do you realize that, in this connection, I have not used the word *thinking*? That, instead, I have spoken of *feeling*, of *emotion*? This is not a process of the *intellect*. If I allowed myself to *think* about that lamp, for instance, and what I am saying about it, I would be jarred out of my concentration immediately, and feel like laughing instead of crying. As long as I remain under the spell of the *emotion* I have evoked and *keep on talking*, no matter what I say, the tears will come and *I can’t prevent them*

although I *can* control them by the exact measuring of the amount of emotion I care to express. That's where the *intellect* comes in. Remember, it is the *rider* on that raging steed, *imagination*.

Here is something I want to make very plain. It is not *reality* that must be striven for. It is *seeming* reality that must be your goal. That is why I employ asinine words so plainly at variance with the pathos in my voice, to make students see that the *effect* can be achieved without the aid of pathetic words. My tears are just as wet as they would be if my heart were breaking over that rather ugly bronze lamp on my desk, and I look and sound every bit as woe-begone.

If I told you that I cry over that lamp because I am actually sorry for it—well, I think you would have a right to conclude that I must be slightly “tetched in the head.” *Of course* I'm not sorry because that poor lamp can't get off my desk and walk around the room—that it's just a cold lump of green bronze without a tongue in its head! I'm *sorry*, period. I'm sorry *only* because I am concentrating on *sorrow*, and merely use spoken words to help hold that concentration and heighten its effect by the tone of my voice.

And here is something else I want to make plain. What I am talking about is quite different

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from trying to imagine that *I am a bronze lamp*, and trying to think how I would feel in its pitiful, helpless plight, sitting on a desk all day and no place to go. That would arouse all sorts of conflicting thoughts in my mind, and that's what I *don't* want! Being sane, I simply *can't imagine* that I *am* an inanimate object, or a "bird talking to a horse," and neither can anyone else. Don't fall for any such absurdity.

I will give you an example of what I mean by striving for *seeming* reality. Many times I have seen young actors in motion pictures try to lash themselves into a pathetic mood. They were trying for the impossible, going at it that way. But here is a sample of what went on.

Fearfully, with doubt and trepidation, they try to think of something *real* that will harrow their souls: Their mothers have died! They are sunk in the deepest sorrow! Their hearts are broken! . . . *What's that noise? Did someone call? Are they ready to shoot the scene, already? . . . Oh, yes . . . Mother! . . .*

In and out they go in an agonizing attempt to *feel* something, with their objective senses denying them entrance into the subjective realm (where they *must* go) simply because they are trying to go there through reason and reality, instead of from a well-

nigh automatic approach to emotion, unrelated to actuality.

"Mother is dead! How can I bear it?" And the reasoning faculty, the objective mind, argues back, "She isn't, either! That's a ghoulisn thought, any-way. . . . Can't you think of something else? . . ." And all the time, the dreaded moment when they will be called onto the set is getting nearer and nearer. And the nearer it gets, the more frantic and dry-eyed they become.

My aim is to teach them to rely on something much surer and far less wearing on the nervous system. And this is it:

A few seconds before you start the scene, turn away and repeat some phrase which you have, through practice, tied up with an emotional pattern. Don't fool around with any nonsense as I do in teaching, just to show how easy it is. Use some short, really pathetic phrase, such as a murmured prayer. Remember, *spoken* words help you hold your concentration and increase its spell.

Put the heart-break into your voice that you have learned to associate with those words. *Mood-patterns* and *voice-patterns!* *Think of nothing concrete, no harrowing pictures,* because if you do, the dramatist in you will start writing a plot and dialogue for you. *And this is no time to be turning author!*

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Just sink into the emotion your own voice will augment (*if* you are an actor!) and, in complete concentration on what you are hearing, let that emotion unlock the flood gates. *It is like priming a pump.*

These few seconds of concentration prepare you to speak the moving words the playwright has given you, when you actually start playing the scene. And when you begin to say them, even though they may not have been too divinely chosen by their author, they will complete the cycle and will seem to us, when we hear them, fraught with depth and emotion, warmth and pathos. Don't *wear out* the real words of the scene by constant repetition.

Make all the mental pictures you can in *preparation of the scene*—and the more graphic you make them, the better—but don't wait until you are in front of the camera! It's too late then. You'll begin to pick and choose, to select and reject, *and* flounder!

Do exactly the same thing when you are acting that you do in life. If you were telling something that had actually happened to you, you wouldn't need to stop and reconstruct the scene at all. It would be *alive in memory*, wouldn't it? Make your mental pictures as real as you possibly can in *studying* the part, then *play from memory—the synthetic memories you have invented.*

This thing is a sort of self-hypnosis. And the longer you practice it, the quicker you will make your transitions from one mood into another, until they become well-nigh instantaneous. When that happens *you won't need any formula!* You will have arrived at the point where you can depend on your responses coming with the same assurance with which you flip a light switch, and get light.

And here is something else: *Don't* go around sunk in gloom when you are not acting in a scene! Emotion *must* be turned off as readily as it is turned on.

You may finish the day, with all the many repetitions of scenes which are necessary in pictures, looking like the-day-after "The Lost Weekend"; but if someone says, "Have you heard this one?" *and you can't laugh, even while you are wiping your eyes and blowing your nose*, then you haven't yet achieved complete control.

Now, don't think that I have given so much space to the mood of pathos because I believe it the most important of all—I don't. I have laid stress upon pathos, and how to go about controlling and expressing it, merely because it is a great *breaker-down of inhibitions*. For most people, it takes greater concentration and abandonment of self, in the beginning, than do the other moods or emo-

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tions. Once you have mastered that trick, the others come more easily.

It is the actor's job to *interpret* the author, but it is just as important to embellish his lines and make them glow with the fire of life.

But don't forget, *before performance comes interpretation*. By that, I mean the strictly intellectual analysis of a role.

What type of man or woman has the author written?

What is the background of the character? What made this person feel the way he or she does, and do the things they do?

If there is not enough in the dialogue to provide you with all the motives animating them, *make up your own story about them* so that they seem alive to you.

But *live the part*? To do that, my friend, you would have to feel like committing murder in order to play a murderer!

Do you think Robert Montgomery felt any pressing desire to cut off Rosalind Russell's charming head in "Night Must Fall"—or even Dame May Whitty's? But he gave you the creeps just the same, didn't he?

Boris Karloff seems pretty sinister, doesn't he? But he's really a charming, soft-spoken, middle-

aged gentleman with a lisp. Do you think for a minute he could *live* Frankenstein's Monster or any of the other grisly characters he plays?

Do you think Charles Boyer has a secret consuming passion for crown jewels? And yet, who ever saw more naked, insane desire in anyone's eyes than in his when he gazed at them in mad fascination in "Gas Light?"

No, all of these, and all great actors, simply are equipped with *acting imagination*. They *do not live* their characterizations. They have used their "acting brains" to create in themselves emotional patterns of a great variety *and the author supplies the material which they cut and fit to their own personalities and physical appearances*.

"Versatility" is a much over-rated commodity in acting except in "character" work. It does not play a very important part in the great star system. Does that surprise you?

All right, go to plays or pictures and see your favorite stars—not what we call "character actors," but those of the romantic-lead type. The parts they are portraying may be quite different from anything you have ever seen them play; therefore *they* will seem different, but *are* they? Not entirely in appearance certainly, because you wouldn't like that, nor in voice. You would not be satisfied if you

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couldn't recognize their faces behind their make-ups, or their voices even with assumed accents.

Where the producer is smart, he sticks to "type-casting" and gives you what you want. That is, to see the stars looking and sounding as you expect them to.

The moods may be different, very different, but the physical tools with which the actor works—vocal chords, face, and body—are the same.

Then what is different and unique in all the fine performances of such artists? Nothing in this world but *mood* and *material* and the subtlety with which they interpret the author's words until the characters they play *seem* to come to life.

And how do they create this miracle of "seeming to be" the roles they play?

First: By being so lucky as to have been born ACTORS.

Second: By having worked to gain control over the imagination through concentration.

Third: By training their voices, faces, and bodies to respond to their every mood.

Go thou and do likewise!

A Dramatic Coach

Makes a Confession

NOW that we have done with the actual teaching, I want to just chat with you about an actor's problems in general.

We will talk of many things, such as how to go about putting into practice some of the ideas I have given you. It is fine to prepare yourself for the job, but *you will make a better job of the preparation* if you have some definite goal in view; and, among other things, I shall give you some advice about getting into pictures.

But first I want to make a confession, a dreadful one for any dramatic coach to make.

We directors and coaches are supposed to be perfectionists, to know all there is about acting (and search as I may, I cannot find where I have ever made myself conspicuous by denying that I do know—well, maybe not *all*). I have told you at

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great length just what an actor *must* have to succeed, what his assets must be, and exactly how to go about improving them vocally, physically, and in every other way *but*—and here it comes.

I had rather hear an actor speak with unpleasant edges on his voice, and even with a slight impediment in his speech, *if he makes me believe what he says*, than listen to the finest voice on earth if it creates no pictures in my mind.

I don't mind *too much* if the actor is a bit hollow-chested or homely as a mud fence if he doesn't keep reminding me that it is *he* moving about up there. I want to believe I am looking at the character in the story, and I don't want to look at the most beautiful physical specimen ever seen on land or sea or in the air if it insists upon standing between me and the author.

Naturally, when I say "actor," I mean women too. I have to admit, though, that a *little* beauty is mighty helpful to women.

Perhaps I should *not* have said all this. I don't want it to open the gates of hope to a swarm of malformed and otherwise handicapped young people. But *this* I do want. I want you to *refuse* to be put off a career simply because you have been given an inferiority complex by my, or anyone else's, rigid standards.

We lay down the rules. *You* break them, and go on to the top *if* you have the divine gift in you!

If you *have* that gift and enough gumption to come in out of the rain, you will work to increase your assets and decrease your liabilities.

I have told you that if you do *not* have the God-given talent no amount of technical training will ever make an actor of you.

I tell you now, that if you do have it *and can get the work*, you, yourself, can finish the job which the Lord of Creation started and *make an actor of yourself just by doing enough of it*.

What a confession for a dramatic coach to make! But it's the truth, and it's the way young people of my day learned to act—a bit more fortunate day, I think, for actors. We learned by *doing* and we had the theaters in which to do it.

Then, as now, we came to the theater from the small towns as well as the cities, from the whistle stops and the farms. In the, at that time, tiny town of Hanford in the San Joaquin Valley there were two children who lived on the same block only a few houses apart. There was nothing in anyone's wildest dreams to suggest that those little girls, Pauline Lord and Lillian Albertson, would meet again, some twenty years later, on Broadway. But there we were at the Harris Theatre with Pauline

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playing my "erring" sister in "The Talker." . . . I was the "Talker." (No rude remarks, please!) Pauline, as all the world knows, went on steadily to bigger and better roles, among them her unforgettable "Anna Christie."

In fact, most of the stars of my day came from small towns just as they do now. So, don't let your environment get you down!

But the one thing that made our times more fortunate for young players was that there were stock companies all over the country, in every sizable city, and we went to work in them for a year or so before we ventured to try our wings on Broadway. There were no motion pictures then, of course, and Broadway was the Promised Land for every actor.

By the time we got there, we had lost self-consciousness and had gained self-esteem. We *knew* we were *good*, and were not afraid to ask for the best New York had to offer. And we got it.

In almost all of these stock companies there would be at least a couple of pretty fine actors, and from them we learned to move about easily and naturally.

We were told, perhaps not in just so many words, ". . . do not saw the air too much with your hand, thus; but use all gently; for in the very torrent, tempest, and as I may say, the whirlwind of pas-

sion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness . . .”

Yes, Shakespeare had just about said it all when the English theater was still in its swaddling clothes!

No one person seemed to teach us much, but we observed the better actors about us and learned to act from them. But now there are few such practical training schools for this generation, as the stock companies were for mine. There is usually nothing but Little Theater and the dramatic school.

When these are well-conducted by competent professionals and *not* by those who have failed as actors and have reverted to their amateur standing because there was nothing else for them to do—then, I say, go to them, and learn by *doing*. Of course, if you are near a motion picture studio and can persuade them to give you a stock contract, the coach will see to your training and set you on the right course.

These Little Theaters and dramatic schools may teach you a lot of things which you will later unlearn but they will afford you the opportunity to test your strength; and if you have it in you, you will learn much in the doing.

And how are you to tell the good ones from the bad?

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Make this your test: If they start teaching you "surrealism" in acting—and that is exactly what the stupid abracadabra of impossible imagery is!—then grab your hat *and* your checkbook, and make for the nearest exit!

Surrealism may be all right for painters, if they can sell the stuff, but there is nothing in it for actors.

Acting is for the multitude, for those whom people of that ilk love to call the "common man," and without whose patronage there would be no theaters and no motion pictures for the surrealists to mess around in.

Don't let anyone make you "arty." Start off trying to be honest and simple and stay that way!

Learn to sit on the valve of your emotions. Let only as much power escape as the scene calls for. That "head of steam" is highly important but it must be kept under control. At all times, outbursts of emotion must be held within bounds—rendered believable.

I remember so well my first realization of that.

When I was a young girl in San Francisco (playing that year of stock) a woman, living in the same apartment house where my mother and I lived, received the shocking word that her husband had died suddenly that afternoon in his office. They had

been in San Francisco but a short time and had made few friends so my mother suggested when I came home from rehearsal that I should go in for a few minutes. I found her alone, walking the floor, wringing her hands, sobbing and wailing, her distorted face swollen and streaked with tears. She would sink into a chair and talk quite calmly one minute; and the next, leap up and stagger about the room screaming, "What am I going to do—what am I going to do!"

I should be ashamed to admit it, but while the tears were streaming down my own face in sympathy for the agony she was suffering, the actor in me was analyzing every word she said, every move she made. I didn't quite realize what I was doing until I had left her. I know it sounds as if I were a perfect little beast—but I'm sure I wasn't, not really. No one could have been sorrier for her than I was, for she had always seemed to adore her husband.

But just the same, I found myself thinking: "If ever you play a part where you have lost someone very dear to you, don't make quite such quick transitions; don't be so extremely violent one minute, and so calm the next—the audience wouldn't believe it; and don't contort your face that much and go through such gyrations—they'd laugh!"

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I was deeply touched, believe it or not!—even while I was taking the emotional reactions apart—*because I knew this was the real thing*. But you see, an audience is never quite that emotionally involved. Even in the presence of the greatest acting they always retain a little objectivity. The very presence of an audience is bound to impinge on the consciousness and keep them from forgetting entirely that it is, after all, *acting*.

She was *living* that agony, poor soul. *But it would have been a very badly over-played scene on the stage or in a picture.*

That's what Shakespeare meant when he said: ". . . in the very torment, tempest, and as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness . . ." *and make it believable*. He was talking about *acting*, not *life*!

In other words, it isn't good acting "to tear a passion to tatters" *although we sometimes do it in life*. And we must not indulge in an "emotional jag" in our acting, thinking we are depicting *life*, because an audience just won't believe it!

A very famous star played a role, a few years back, in which she groveled and grunted, strutted and shrieked until the audience thought she must have gone crazy. But she hadn't—she had just gone

a little wild at getting her very nice teeth into what she considered a "meaty" role.

As she was too important to be told the truth by anyone around her, I think it was the greatest shock of her life when the show promptly closed. *Audiences can stand for just so much, and no more.* Naked, uncontrolled emotion embarrasses them.

A love scene, played too realistically, will make an audience titter even more quickly than an overly dramatic emotional scene. The same caliber of mind that would let some people peek through a keyhole at the real thing and enter into the spirit of the situation, will make them guffaw from embarrassment in the theater because they are ashamed to be so aroused in the presence of others. So it should be apparent, even when a scene is true to life, it can still be too raw and revealing for the comfort of an audience.

Here is something about which I have not said enough, and it is of vital interest to young people. "How," you may ask, "do I go about *getting* this experience of which you have spoken when I live in a small town where there is no dramatic school or community theater?"

First, do all you can, alone, with the ideas I have given you. Learn to speak correct English, exercise, practice good posture, learn to walk and sit

gracefully and naturally, try to teach yourself to *think* acting—but *don't stop at that!*

If you have no private means, go to work and earn the money to support yourself while you try out what you have learned in the nearest city where there is a Little Theater or *form an acting group, wherever you are*, if that is the best you can do. But *do something!*

Remember this: The greatest swimming coach alive can teach you just so much while you are standing on the edge of the pool. You may *believe* that what he is telling you will keep you afloat, but you will never *know* it until you get into the water over your head. You may still need help, but *don't make a career out of the training period*. Get in and swim!

Let us pursue this swimming analogy a little further. I would be the last person in the world to advise you to waste years trying to become a professional swimmer if you prove to yourself that you and water have no natural affinity, because you just don't have to be a professional swimmer. There are other things in life. And what I am getting at is that *you don't have to be an actor either* if you find, after you have tried it, that you have no natural affinity to acting. Give yourself a trial

period of a few months and then, if you are no good at it, *do something else*.

Fuzzy-minded idolaters of the drama and all things dramatic have told you how the great actors and actresses have "suffered" for their art! How they have struggled, and gone cold and hungry!

Well, I was never a lover of suffering, myself—either for me or anyone else. I see no profit or cultural uplift in going without food and a decent place to live. A garret and a crust of bread never appealed to me as quite the place or the diet for building self-esteem.

Too prolonged "trying" at *anything* in which you should show definite symptoms of ability almost from the start, as in acting, simply doesn't make sense.

Oh, there may be times of rough sledding after you have convinced yourself that you really have enough talent to make it worth while to go on fighting. If you have that conviction, go on by all means. I was about to say, "by any means," *but that I won't say*. I cannot agree that you should try to succeed by any means that lessen *you* in the slightest degree, as a *person*. Nothing you will ever achieve in any field whatever can make it up to you in the long run for the sacrifice of a single principle or standard.

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Remember that you probably will go on living many years after those footlights have dimmed for you and the last flicker has faded out on the silver screen. See to it that you gather the sort of memories that will be comfortable to sit down with in the long, quiet evenings by your fireside.

Preaching? No, I am not! I am not even speaking of "morals," in the usual sense. I'm talking about the little snide tricks so many people deem necessary in order to reach the top, in this profession in particular.

But if you want to put it on that old "sex-morals" basis, I'm willing to say my piece on that too! It irks me to hear those who know nothing whatever about either the theater or motion pictures talk so glibly about the "perils" and "the dangers to girls" in the acting profession.

It would be stupid and not quite honest of me to say there is not every opportunity for girls to "go wrong," *if* they are gaited that way. There is! But the same girls would go just as wrong in a business office, or in a factory, or in a shop.

It is just plain dumb to think that a girl has any need to lower her moral standards in order to succeed either on the stage or in motion pictures. It is strictly up to her, and she will think much more highly of herself if she wins out on merit rather

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than on any cheap "sell-out." I don't know why I call it "cheap!" She is liable to find it the most expensive deal she ever made and, what's more (and, oh, what a lot of them I have seen this happen to), more often than not she will find herself unable to cash in on the investment.

Don't believe it if anyone tells you girls that that is the path most of the successful women stars have followed. It is not. They have worked hard for everything they have, every step of the way. It is time that foolish canard was silenced for keeps.

Now for that advice on how to go about getting into motion pictures. There are so many ways, and some of them entirely accidental, that it would be impossible to cover them all. But first, I want to say this to you—and I cannot put it too emphatically: Don't come to Hollywood without having tested your ability; certainly not until you have found out if you even have any. Just because you have good looks and a great desire, don't take the risk until you are quite sure.

Of course, there have been cases, widely publicized (too widely, in fact), of pretty girls being chosen right out from under their trays at drive-ins or snatched off elevators by talent scouts, and of husky young men being tapped on the shoulder at filling stations. But it doesn't happen very often,

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you can take my word for that. Those are the ways of getting into pictures which I referred to as accidents. I wouldn't gamble on it happening to me if I were you.

If you have ample means to see you through, to pay for your coaching or for roles in the many "little theater schools" here, that is different. It won't hurt so much, then, if you cannot attract the eye of a talent scout from some studio or one of the many agents who attend these performances. At least, you will not go hungry.

Men can sleep on park benches and do a lot of other things too dangerous for girls. If you know of anything more pitiable than a girl broke in a strange town, I can't imagine what it is.

You *might* have the luck to find an agent to represent you right at the start, without ever having played a role anywhere. We do get such people here at the studio, but unless you know someone who will introduce you to an agent, your chances of finding one who can do anything for you are rather slim.

Every important studio maintains a talent-scouting office in New York and some of the other major cities. It might be better for you to get in contact with them before venturing a trip to Hollywood.

But don't come here with a scant few weeks' supply of money! It may take months before you even

land a role in a little theater or dramatic school. And, if you do, you may not be good enough in that first one to warrant the afore-mentioned talent scout's arranging an interview for you with first, the dramatic coach and, later, if you pass that test, with the head of the Talent Department.

There can be a good deal of red tape to be unwound, even if the verdict is unanimous, before you receive that coveted "stock contract." So, don't come unprepared to wait. And be sure you have the where-with-all to pay for food, shelter, and good clothes while you're waiting.

Now may I indulge in a bit of wistful reminiscing, and just talk for a few minutes about actors, past and present?

How I wish that every young actor of this generation had had the privilege of seeing John Barrymore in "Hamlet." I remember him, also, in the light comedy roles, like thistle-down, of his earlier days. All you young people will remember is 'a merry-andrew, tongue in cheek, giving a sardonic, bawdy burlesque of the Barrymore that was. But *there* was an actor!

I wish you might have seen the supremely great Sarah Bernhardt, the most superb player I ever saw or ever expect to see . . . Minnie Maddern Fiske . . . Coquelin . . . Holbrook Blinn . . .

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But before I become too wistful, and nostalgic for the theater of my youth, let us come down to this day and age and remember that you are blessed by having many splendid present-day artists to serve as models for all that is best in acting.

They are yours *to learn from*, not to copy.

Who could ask for anyone better in the strong "he-man" roles than a Clark Gable or a Spencer Tracy?

Since Valentino, I have seen no foreign-born actor who quite equals Charles Boyer—and for all my fond memories and admiration of Valentino, I consider Boyer by far the better actor.

For romantic appeal and sheer virtuosity, how could anyone excel Cary Grant, who can play the rowdiest farce as unerringly as he plays tragedy?

And let us not pass Bing Crosby. He has become as honest and sincere as any actor in pictures. As witness, his Academy Award performance of "Father O'Malley" in Leo McCarey's wonderful picture, "Going My Way."

Lacking a Bernhardt, I give you Ingrid Bergman and Rosalind Russell as two of the greatest actresses of our day.

Rosalind Russell—with what consummate artistry she handles each situation, blending comedy and pathos with all the sureness of a maestro con-

ducting a symphony. She has the dexterity and the delicacy of touch of a juggler tossing glass balls in the air and catching them with unerring skill. It would be hard to say in which field she excels, comedy or drama, for she has made them both her own.

As for Ingrid Bergman—what a lesson it would be if all the talented girls who aspire to an acting career could sit with me in the projection room at the studio and watch that young woman in the various “shots” made on the set the preceding day.

Then they would know what I mean by “turning emotion on and off.” Before each “take” they would see her for a second or two, eyes sparkling, exchanging banter with someone on the set—then, the moment the order to start the scene is given, her head goes down for just an instant and comes up again with all the tragedy of the world in her eyes and voice. There is imagination under complete control! Bergman’s emotional responses are all but instantaneous, and that is equally true of Russell.

Notice, on the screen, how each achieves her great effects without “screwing-up” her face and wrinkling her brows. And yet it would be impossible to find more expressive faces anywhere, or voices more responsive to their every mood.

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I call Ingrid Bergman and Rosalind Russell (who are as different from each other as day and night) *great* because they are both so utterly simple and downright. There is not an ounce of "phony" in their handsome, intelligent faces or their tall, well-trained bodies. Russell is the exponent, par excellence, of Anglo-Saxon womanhood, in all its phases. Bergman could not be expected to be typically American or British. She is *every* woman, from girlhood to femme fatale.

There are many, many more who are worthy of your emulation, *never imitation*.

There are those gifted actresses of the theater, Helen Hayes and Katharine Cornell. I could write a chapter on the virtues of Ethel Barrymore and although she is of my generation, she has much to teach girls of this.

Study them all.

Learn to speak the best and purest English you can.

Train your body, face, and voice to do what you want them to do.

Think of acting as the simple, honest thing that it is.

And, when you have done all that, *then indeed will the good Lord bless and prosper you.*

Self-Assurance

If you have no faith in yourself, how can you expect anyone to have faith in you? If you are not poised, sure of yourself, confident, everyone with whom you come in contact will sense that weakness and take advantage of it.

Carry with you, wherever you go, a quiet, unassertive self-assurance. No one will have the slightest inclination to quarrel with that. It is only the bumptious folk who throw their weight around and brag about themselves who get under our skins and challenge us. They create in us an "Oh, yeah?" attitude. It makes us long to whittle them down to their proper size and we instinctively criticize everything they say or do. They may be good, but we sit back and dare them to prove it.

Don't *tell* anyone how good you are: just *admit it modestly*, if the subject comes up. If you feel, in

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the innermost depths of your being, without a single doubt or fear, that you have something to offer, people will get it in the first few minutes they talk with you. They will sense the quiet, unspoken belief in self and be interested in spite of themselves. And that very assurance within you will lead you *to say and do the right things* to reveal to them what you want them to know.

Highly sensitive people need to cultivate the greatest self-assurance. Protected from storm and strife, they may do a pretty good job of convincing themselves that they are, indeed, the masters of their fates, the captains of their souls. But when they meet the head winds of resistance, their frail barks are apt to be swept away from their moorings by the other fellow's "blow-hard" and pile up on the beach, crushed and helpless. Complete *self-assurance* is a mighty anchor to windward.

I think I'll tell you of an instance in my early career as an actress to show you how this business of self-confidence pays off, no matter by what reasoning or through what emotional process you manage to screw your courage to the sticking point. In this particular instance, I never could have done what I did in cold blood. It took a lot of righteous indignation. But it was mainly my wounded ego, the affront to my self-esteem, that sent me on a

rampage that was to provide some important repercussions in my young life.

It was on one of the hottest days I can ever remember. I had sat for three solid hours that afternoon on a very solid chair in Kirk La Shelle's outer office waiting for him to see me and the other young hopefuls sweltering there. Through the door, as it swung open for the office boy to take in another batch of our cards, we could hear the merry cacophony of masculine voices which floated out to us on a cloud of tobacco smoke.

No one was being ushered in. We just sat, and perspired while they chatted and guffawed; and I got sadder and madder. I did so want someone to see me that day! I knew I looked sweet in my pale blue dress and big lace hat and it seemed such a waste not to show myself to someone.

At five o'clock the office boy came out with a small tray on which reposed the collection of our little white pasteboards. We were invited to pick out our own and were told, in the pernickety manner of office boys from time immemorial, that Mr. La Shelle was seeing no one that day. Then I really got mad! Here we had sat all that hot, stuffy afternoon before His Highness decided to put us out of our misery, when he could just as well have done it three hours earlier.

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I stormed out of that office and down the stairs, swearing by all that was holy that *someone* would see me that day! Down Broadway I marched, straight to the Empire Theater, telling myself every step of the way there and all the way up in the elevator, "You're great! . . . There's no one in New York better than you are! . . . They can't *do* this to you!"

I don't know how I intended to get in to see William Seymour, who was Charles Frohman's director, but intend to, I did! I had been in New York only a little over a year and had played the leading roles in three complete failures, so my name didn't mean a thing to anyone who really counted. Several times I had tried to see Mr. Seymour but I had never been able to get past the little black Cerberus who kept vigil over the tiny switch-board with its commanding view of the long hall leading to Mr. Seymour's office.

When I got out of the elevator, not a soul was in sight. Apparently everyone had been sent away for the day, and even the watch-dog of the portal was not at his accustomed post. This was my chance, and I had to work fast!

I scurried down the hall. The door was open and a man—*my* man, I hadn't a doubt—was seated, bent over the desk, reading. I didn't even stop to

knock. I rushed up to the desk and said, "Mr. Seymour, I'm Lillian Albertson from California and *I want an engagement!*"

I hadn't planned what I was going to say, I hadn't had time, but I couldn't have sounded more desperate if I had accosted him in a dark alley with a gun in my hand. He looked up, rather startled, but seeing what was confronting him, his face broke into a broad grin and he said, in exactly my own tone of voice, "Well, Lillian Albertson from California, *sit down!*"

I practically collapsed into the chair. And then I started to laugh, as the ridiculousness of the situation struck me. I laughed until the tears ran down my face. It was about as near hysterics as I ever came. He seemed to think it was pretty funny too, for he was laughing until he shook all over, and there was a lot of him to shake. It was probably the most unorthodox introduction he had ever had to an actress, and certainly the most emotional.

By the time I got my eyes dried, I was telling him all about myself, how many good roles I had played, and what an experienced old hand I really was.

He said, "That is a lot of experience for a girl your age. Have you told me all you want to?" I nodded. "All right, then, I'll tell *you* something,

but I don't want you to get all excited . . ." (I guess he wouldn't have put it past me, after that entrance, to swing from the chandelier if I got *excited* over what he was going to tell me.) "Now, I don't know that anything will come of it. It all depends on whether Drina de Wolfe accepts this role, or not—and she hasn't agreed to yet. . . . But, hold on, now—we have every hope she will . . . but if she *doesn't*, I'm going to recommend to Mr. Frohman that he give you a try at it."

He cut off my slightly incoherent thanks and said, "Now you go on home—but don't keep calling me up, because I will phone you on Tuesday and let you know. Mr. Frohman will be back from London on Monday" (I already knew that) "and by Tuesday we will have the answer."

I walked out of there on air, and for four days and nights I worried until I could hardly eat or sleep. I'm afraid nothing that could have happened to poor Drina de Wolfe, short of permanent injury or sudden demise, would have left me quite desolate. And then, the blow fell.

Mr. Seymour broke it to me gently. But in spite of the fact that he said he wouldn't forget me and that there would be something else, all that really mattered was that she *had* accepted the role after all, and I was not going to get it.

With the horrid doubts that always assail even the most valiant of us when we feel "let down," I suspected that Mr. Seymour was just being kind and that I would never hear from him again. But right after I had played in another prize failure, which didn't even open in New York, and had returned from the try-out, I got a telephone call from him one morning. He said, "You see, I haven't forgotten you. We have nothing to offer you right now, but I have recommended you to George Tyler for the part of 'Thora' in Hall Caine's play, 'The Prodigal Son.' He's expecting a call from you."

My dear friend, Charlotte Walker, had opened as "Thora" in the big all-star cast at the New Amsterdam. I happened to know she was not too happy in those austere surroundings and was leaving for an individual starring role, but I had never dreamed they would consider *me* for "Thora." Mr. Tyler wouldn't have, either, if it had not been for the impression I had made on William Seymour. And I had made that impression simply because *I believed in myself* and was so furious over the affront suffered in La Shelle's office that I didn't care what *anybody* thought when I barged into his office that day. Emotion had robbed me of any and every inhibition.

I had always been so reserved and so very dec-

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orous that I would have been quite incapable of doing it as a clever stunt. And it wouldn't have worked if I had! Without plenty of rehearsal, I would have overdone it probably—but this was a scene played in the fire of the heart, and with great conviction and spontaneity.

Had I been properly ushered in I would have landed at his desk, at that stage in my career, with my heart going a mile a minute and sat down like a frightened field mouse, and showing about as much personality. As it was, I was too outraged to feel the usual trepidation.

That interview taught me something I never forgot. I never tried any more spectacular entrances, you may be sure; but I learned, right then and there, that you've simply got to let personality show through, no matter how you manage to do it! If it takes colossal conceit, then develop it; but *don't show it in what you say about yourself*. Keep it as a *mental* background that will prevent you from being too meek and mild.

You've got to believe in yourself!

Now, I don't advocate bearding lions in their dens. Not at all! It might have turned out quite unpleasantly for me. The lion, in the person of Mr. Seymour, could have yowled at me to get out of there; but somehow, people—even producers and

directors—just don't often react that way when confronted by an aroused and eager young person, as sure of herself as all that.

. . . speaking of lions, I've often thought that lion-taming and acting have much in common. They are *both* hazardous occupations for one thing. But do you know the main thing that would prevent one of us from putting a lion through its paces and making it sit up and do tricks? We could watch a lion-tamer do his act, and copy every look, gesture, and tone of voice, but if we were *scared*, the lion would sense the uncertainty and fear in us and, with one mighty swipe, land us up against the bars. But the lion-tamer? He knows he has something on that lion! He goes into the cage without the slightest doubt that the beast will do what he wants it to do; and, with few exceptions, it does. Otherwise there would be fewer lion-tamers.

It's the *mental* attitude which makes all the difference. The lion-tamer believes in himself and is unafraid. He doesn't bluster around and brag about himself to the king of beasts. Being uncertain and very much afraid, we would shout our prowess and our superiority; and the lion would either yawn in our faces, or, becoming annoyed, eliminate us entirely.

No matter what kind of a bluff we may put up,

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in any situation, the real state of our feelings will reveal itself. No truer words were ever spoken than these of Emerson's: "What you are speaks so loud I cannot hear what you say."

Evaluate all those with whom you come in contact at their true worth, and dare to give yourself as high a rating as you merit. Shucks, go a little overboard and give yourself the benefit of any doubt! Don't be sold off yourself and your purpose by *anyone*, no matter how august that presence may be. *Believe in yourself and, if you are not too terribly wrong, the world will believe in you.*

Self-Reliance

One night, while I was playing in "The Silver Girl" at Wallack's (a famous old theater which has since vanished from the Broadway scene) I noticed two elderly gentlemen sitting in the left-hand box nearest the stage. I had never seen either of them before and, if I had any reaction at all, I imagine it must have been that I was glad *someone* was sitting there, for "The Silver Girl" had proved to be of baser metal and was about to be taken out of circulation.

When I made my exit, I found the rest of the cast back stage in a perfect dither. *That was Frohman, out there!* The great Charles Frohman, the god of every actor's idolatry.

They were all wondering *why* he was there, knowing, as they did, that he seldom went to the theater any more because of the malady that had all but deprived him of the use of his legs.

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I was a bit jittery, too; but in spite of my own excitement, I couldn't help smiling, a smug cat-that-just-ate-the-canary smile, at the speculation as to what had brought him, because I *knew* why he was there. He had come to see me! But I knew, too, it was only because Ethel Barrymore, his brilliant young star, had persuaded him to come, just as she had told me she would, a few weeks earlier, when she dropped in at a matinee at the old Belasco Theater in Los Angeles where I was playing "Mrs. Dane's Defense."

She was appearing in "Cousin Kate" (or perhaps it was "Captain Jinks," I don't quite remember) at the Mason Opera House and had come to see the local stock company on one of her off-matinee days. The word that Ethel Barrymore was "out front" spread like wildfire—and did I give that weeping lady, "Mrs. Dane," my all! I had hoped she would like me, but when the stage-door man rapped at my dressing-room door, right after the final curtain, to ask in an awe-struck voice if I could see *Miss Barrymore*, I nearly fainted.

She was the most famous and popular young star in America, but no one would have guessed it from her simplicity and the interest she showed that day in another young actress who was still a long way from the top. I've told her many times,

but I don't believe she could ever quite realize what she did for me, for my self-esteem, my faith in myself.

With the enthusiasm for acting of all the Barrymores, she offered to send Frohman a wire then and there. But even though I was thrilled, as I had never been in my life, by her graciousness and the compliments she paid me, I had to tell her it wouldn't do any good because I had just signed a contract to go back to New York to appear in a new play, "The Silver Girl," and was leaving Los Angeles in two weeks.

On my opening night at Wallack's I had received one of those charming, thoughtful telegrams which, with all the excitement of her own career, Ethel Barrymore was never too busy to send. And here, tonight, was Frohman, making one of his infrequent appearances at a theater, all because she had not forgotten . . .

Let me digress for a moment to say that almost never will we find ourselves without a *choice* of roads to follow when the pace of life begins to quicken as it had for me. When that green light opens the way for us, there always seems to be more than one tempting vista; but *we* are the only ones who know where we want to go and we, alone, must choose the road . . .

With the egotism of youth, backed by some pretty good notices, I hadn't a doubt that Charles Frohman would like me. I was quite certain he would send for me; and when his office phoned the next morning, I was not in the least surprised. But that night after the theater, I lay awake trying to make *my* choice. By morning I had made it.

I had been sent the manuscript of a play by an, as yet, unknown author, which was to be presented by two producers new to Broadway. Not much there, one might say, to weigh in the balance against an offer from *Charles Frohman*; but the play was "Paid in Full," and before I had even finished reading it, I knew I would play the role of Emma Brooks if it was the last act of my life!

I was tremendously grateful to Ethel Barrymore and tingling with excitement at the chance to meet Frohman, but I went to his spacious offices above the Empire Theater knowing exactly which road I was going to travel.

I found one of the kindest little men I had ever met—his nickname of the "theatrical Napoleon" could have applied only to his stature and his great achievements—certainly, I could see none of *that* gentleman's ruthlessness in him. He apologized for not rising and invited me to take the chair by his desk.

He said some very pleasant things about my performance; asked me to tell him what I had done before; and, after a while, told me what he had in mind for me—a year's contract, starting with a translation of a French farce; *and during the rest of that interview, we argued.*

When I told him that I couldn't take the contract because I was going to play "Paid in Full," he looked at me as though I were an idiot child. "That play!" he exclaimed. "It hasn't a chance. It's been turned down by every producer in town. It was submitted to me for Annie Russell, but I wouldn't let her play it—"

"But Mr. Frohman," I broke in, "Annie Russell couldn't play that part!"

"Young woman," he all but shouted, "Annie Russell is one of the finest actresses in America! And you have the temerity to think *you* can play a part *she* can't play?"

"Yes, Mr. Frohman, I do!" I told him. "I know I'm not as good an actress as she is, yet. But I'm young, and she's too old for it!"

I thought for a minute he was going to have me thrown out bodily, and then he said, "You have a pretty fine opinion of yourself, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have!" I shot back at him. "I've worked hard to learn my business. I played a year of stock

before coming to New York and after five years here I even went out to Los Angeles for another six months of stock experience to prove some things to myself, and I've come back a much better actress! . . . Please, Mr. Frohman, I don't want you to think I'm conceited . . . that I don't appreciate. . . ."

Then he smiled and reached over and patted my hand, which was clutching his desk in a death grip. "That's all right," he said. "You wouldn't be worth talking to all this time if you didn't believe in yourself . . . and *weren't* a little conceited."

Then he proceeded to tear the new play apart: "Paid in Full," in his opinion, was just a sordid "kitchen drama," set in a drab Harlem flat. A married couple, no romance! Why, the man was a crook and his wife a commonplace housewife! . . . Oh, yes, she had some big acting scenes—but who would care . . . ?

Charles Frohman was the most powerful and successful "maker of stars" in America, and I wasn't even a star—but I backed my opinion against his and dared to refuse the contract he offered me because I was convinced that I knew what was best for me *and it wasn't a French farce!*

Now, had I made the wrong decision it would have been tragic for me. I knew that, then. But I

also knew that if I allowed myself to be talked out of the play which I felt was the only right one for me that I deserved to be *smothered in French farces*! And, just to show how right I was and how wrong a great manager could be, that is just what would have happened to me. He produced *seven* of them that year with a gorgeous young beauty, Pauline Frederick, in the parts I would have played. And every one of them "fopped!"

But "Paid in Full" ran for two seasons on Broadway and made millions for those new producers, Wagenhals and Kemper. It also made that obscure author, Eugene Walter, famous. While we played on and on at the Astor, six road companies toured the country and, incidentally, launched the careers of those two fine actresses who were soon to become important stars, Helen Ware and Julia Dean. Helen played in the Chicago company and Julia went on tour with the original company when I left for my delayed honeymoon.

I waited for nearly four years, until my little son was two years old, before playing again. That isn't *quite* what I would advise for young players who are intent on a career. But, I suppose, it all depends on what you want out of life. That was what I wanted then, or thought I did.

I had worked hard and achieved a fair amount

of success. A child, an apartment in town, and a country place out in Westchester where I could dig in the ground and plant things, more than made up to me for a career in the theater—at least, for several years, during which time I played only every third or fourth season when the urge to act overcame the attraction of a winter in Palm Beach, Miami, or Havana. But such sporadic activity is *not* the way to promote an acting career!

There came a day when I wanted complete activity again, but this time it wasn't *acting*. I wanted to be a director, and produce plays.

In 1923, I established headquarters in Los Angeles for the production of Broadway hits, concurrently with their New York runs. The contracts for those particular plays, operettas, and musical comedies, precluded the touring of the Eastern companies beyond Denver; so, for a good many years, most of the first-class productions seen throughout the West were those directed by me. At times, there were more than three hundred people on my payrolls, as during the long engagements of two companies of "Hit the Deck," and the year and a half run of "The Desert Song."

In the beginning of this rather unusual job for a woman, I had a stock phrase (overworked a bit, I've no doubt) but I can assure you I had plenty of

use for it: "Let me make my own mistakes—I'll have to pay for them, anyway—but I don't want to pay for yours!"

You see, there never had been many women producers or directors in the theater (I can remember but *one* in pictures, then) and some of the men around me tried to be a little too "helpful."

One minor instance: my first master carpenter had been at the Astor Theater in New York all through the run of "Paid in Full," so how could he expect me, a mere woman and an actress at that, to know how I wanted my sets constructed? . . . Where I wanted my doors and windows? He called me "Missy," and patronized me until I could have strangled him cheerfully. But I didn't. I fired him, and hired another who would do what I told him to do. From that time on I got what I asked for in *that* department, whether I liked it when I got it or not.

There was more than enough of that sort of thing in other departments as well, but not for long. The box-office, advertising, publicity, and the booking of tours were in competent male hands—but back of the curtain line, I neither wanted nor tolerated much "helpfulness." In any case, it was my money and my reputation at stake; and since I expected

SELF-RELIANCE

to reap the rewards, what could be fairer than to make the decisions and assume the risks?

Therefore I was forced to rely on myself, but when was it ever different? Can you remember ever doing anything important or worthwhile when you have *not* relied on yourself?

My experience in the entire scope of life sums up to this: Try to make *wise* decisions; but *make* them. Try *not* to make mistakes; but if there *must be mistakes*, then make your own. You are going to have to pay for them anyway! And there is nothing quite so frustrating and infuriating in this world as paying for the mistakes of others.

I don't know if the experiences of anyone else ever mean a thing to any of us. But if what I have told you has been of any help to you, if it has given you the courage to map out your own career, if it has encouraged you to rise or fall by your own convictions—then it was worth the telling.

Emerson, that great and wise philosopher, wrote: "Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to that iron string . . . There comes a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction . . . that the power which resides in him is new in nature and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried . . ."

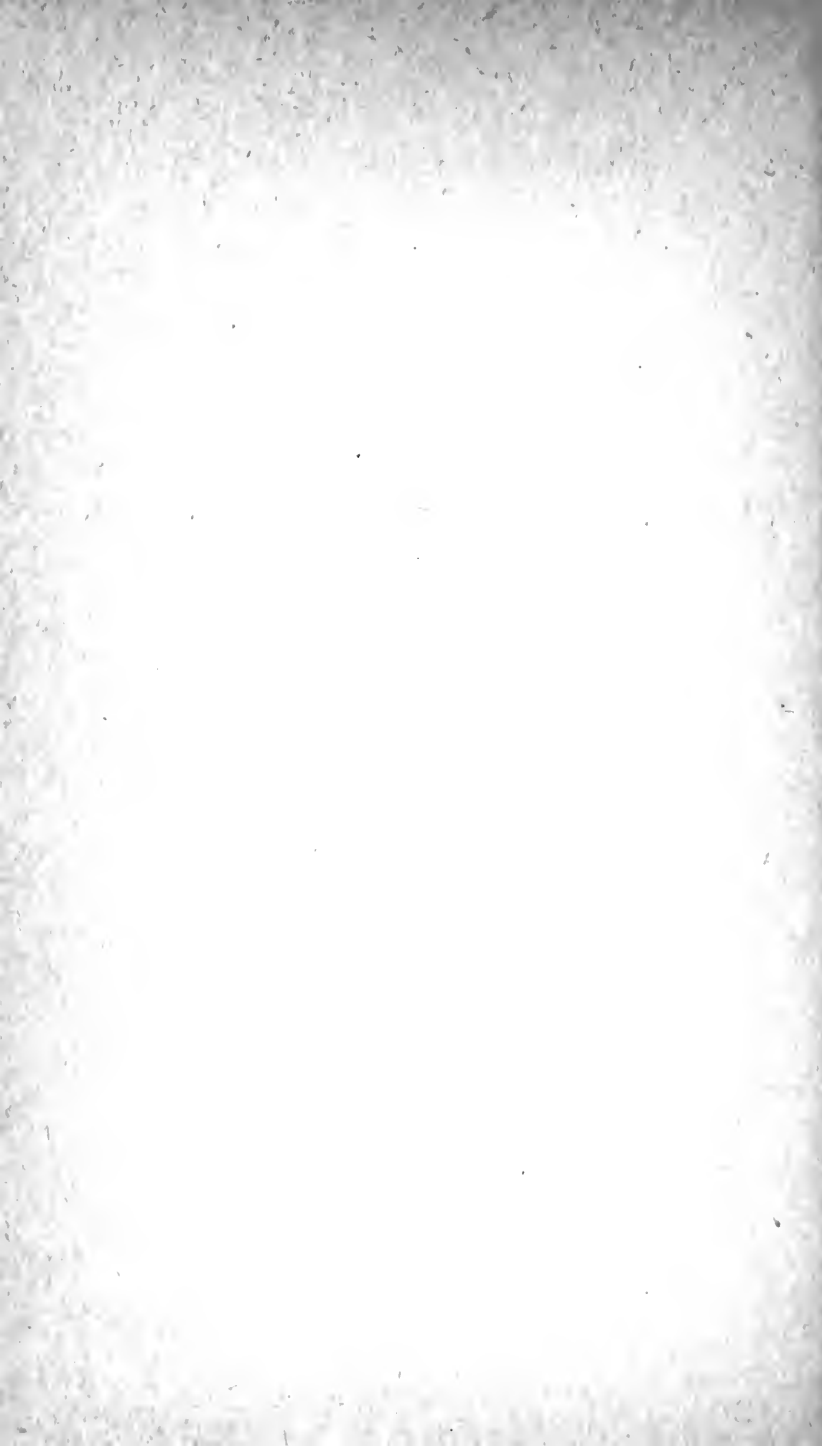
MOTION PICTURE ACTING

Don't sit back and wait for someone to *lead* you where you want to go. The choice of destination, and the path to it, must be yours. *But* don't set out on the journey until you have done considerable work on your itinerary, know something about the place to which you are going, and what you are going to *try* to do when you get there.

So prepare yourself for the journey. Watch for the green light and *go*, with no turning aside, straight for your goal. When you arrive, may peace and happiness await you. Anyway, you may be sure of one thing, *you will have had an exciting trip. . . .*

BON VOYAGE

APPENDAGE



How To Visualize A Role

In the succeeding chapter I shall present three scenes—the first for a woman, the second for a man, and the third for a man and woman—and follow each of them with a detailed analysis of the characters in the scenes. I do this to give you a practical illustration of how to visualize the roles you are playing.

I should prefer to have you know nothing whatever about either the characters or the stories, other than those things which the words themselves reveal in these short scenes. I would rather have you grasp the character, background, and the motivation without any memories of the actors or the performances; but since so many of you are undoubtedly familiar with the book, the picture or the play, it would be impossible to keep you from recognizing them. I may as well be frank and tell you that the first scene is from "This Above All,"—Joan Fon-

MOTION PICTURE ACTING

taine and Tyrone Power starred in the picture; the second, from "Idiot's Delight," with Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt in the stage play, and Clark Gable and Norma Shearer in the picture; and the third is from Noel Coward's picture, "Cavalcade."

THIS ABOVE ALL*

PRUE: You've only told me the things this man's brain has told him not to fight for. What about all the things his *heart* tells him he *should* fight for?

CLIVE: He doesn't think with his heart. Tell me—just a few.

PRUE: All right. I'll try. . . . If anyone asks me *what England is*, he robs me of an answer—because everything it is can't be spoken about—and if you do, it's like pulling a flower apart to analyze it. If I said it was Shakespeare—and thatched roofs—and the countryside, he would laugh. If I said it were speakers in Hyde Park, free to say what they wish—and polite bobbies at the corners—and those cliffs over there—and Drake alive in memory—he would laugh

* From "This Above All," by Eric Knight. Published by Harper & Bros., New York. Copyright, 1941 by Eric Knight, reprinted with permission of the author's estate.

HOW TO VISUALIZE A ROLE

again. If I said England was the New Forest deep in ferns and holly trees; if I said it was May blossoms rich in spring—and bluebells like a god-sent carpet and the rain and the shine and the green of our blessed land . . . if I said it was the larks that will sing here tomorrow, high in the sun, tomorrow and forever . . . or the shout of a newsboy on the corner, or the sound of a taxi horn, or the age and dignity of our cities . . . if I said it was all those things, he would laugh because *words* have said it so often before. I couldn't tell him if he won't see beyond the emptiness of words. But I could make him see! England . . . it's Monty, and the boys coming up the road from Kent—it's you, Clive! England—helping the weaker men into the boats instead of getting in themselves. Whatever this man is . . . blood and bone and mind and heart and spirit—*England made him*—every part of him! Even if he *doesn't* understand the other things, he *would* understand that . . . and when he says the *word*—England—it must be for him, as it is for me—like music that's rich beyond the power of music . . . Those

are the things—and he's got to go back and fight for them—knowing that we'll never give in! Because that's England, too—knowing that we won't be beaten . . . we won't! We just . . . won't! . . . I'm sorry, Clive . . . I'll be all right in a minute.

Now that you have read the scene, let us assume that you have never heard of the picture, and do not know the first thing about the story. We will confine ourselves strictly to this one scene and see what we can find out about this girl, what she is like, and what her problem is. She is English and she is talking to a man named Clive—that much is obvious. We gather from her first speech that he has been telling her about some man who is thoroughly fed up on fighting and wants no part of it. Clive has not identified this man because, she says, at one point, “whatever this man is—”; but I wonder if you will not get the impression, as I did, that she believes Clive is actually speaking of himself and his own reactions. I caught that in the vehemence she expresses in the line, “It's *you*, Clive!

Her first words are: “You've only told me the things this man's *brain* has told him *not to fight for*.”

What about all the things his *heart* tells him he *should* fight for?"

He answers, cynically, "He doesn't think with his heart," and puts it straight up to her to tell him what those things are that this man should go on fighting for. He challenges her with, "Tell me—just a few."

She replies, "All right. I'll try . . ." Then, she hesitates for a second, searching for words to describe what *England* means to her. She doesn't want to be dramatic, that will only make him more cynical. There must be no flag-waving. She admits the difficulty in finding the right words when she says, "If anyone asks me *what England is*, he robs me of an answer—because everything it is can't be spoken about—and if you do, it's like pulling a flower apart to analyze it."

She speaks of the obvious things that any tourist would know about England—"Shakespeare, and thatched roofs, and the countryside"—and says, in effect, "If I told this man that is what England is, he would laugh." She is making an effort to keep what she is saying light and unemotional; but, in spite of herself, when she speaks of "those cliffs over there—" a deeper, more serious tone comes into her voice.

It is from over there the invasion will come—

if it comes; and what could be more natural than that Drake should flash into her mind? It is as though she were breathing a prayer, "Oh, God, for a Drake to turn the Germans back as he drove the Spanish Armada, in utter rout, back onto the rocky coast of France." She speaks the name of Drake with utmost reverence.

It is only for a few seconds that she allows that thought to cloud her mind and voice. She turns quickly to the natural beauties of forest and meadow, but when she speaks of "the larks that will sing here tomorrow, high in the sun—tomorrow and forever," it is as if she were saying, "They can't sing here now—the gunfire and the bombs have frightened them away—but they *shall* sing here again, not only tomorrow but forever!"

At once, she breaks away from that, and speaks lightly of the "shout of a newsboy on the corner, or the sound of a taxi horn." This naturally brings her face to face with the thought of the destruction wrought in the cities, and she cannot keep that concern out of her voice as she speaks of their "age and dignity."

She sums up all these more trivial aspects of England, and says, "If I said it was *all* those things, he would laugh—because *words* have said it so often before."

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She knows she must appeal to Clive through something beyond the mere physical aspects of the country she loves so deeply—"this blessed land"—something beyond "the emptiness of words." She must *make* him *see* the England of valiant men and noble deeds.

It is as if she were hearing a mighty surge of martial music, as she cries that England is "Monty and the boys coming up the road from Kent . . . England—helping the weaker men into the boats instead of getting in themselves!" Of course, she is referring here to what happened at Dunkirk. English manhood is England—as exemplified by Monty and all those brave officers and men who waited on that death-ridden beach until the last wounded Tommy who could be saved was carried to the boats.

"Whatever this man is . . . blood and bone . . . mind and heart and spirit—*England made him*, every part of him! Even if he *doesn't* understand the other things, he *would* understand that . . ."

Then, carried away for the moment, she forgets her fear of being called "sentimental"—"and when he says the *word*—England—it must be for him, as it is for me—like music that's rich beyond the power of music."

She knows she must not leave her appeal on that weakly, "feminine" note. She pulls herself together, and cries, "*Those* are the things—and he's got to go back and fight for them—knowing that we'll never give in! That's England, too—knowing that we won't be beaten . . . we *won't!*" Her voice choked with sudden tears, she falters, "We just . . . won't." Ashamed of her emotion, she lowers her head and murmurs, "I'm sorry, Clive . . . I'll be all right in a minute."

There is the girl—warm, idealistic and intensely, passionately patriotic. But, you may say, "How can I feel what she feels? I, who am an American, and don't give a hoot about England?"

Well, who says I do, either? But when I say those words, I care—I care like anything! And so must you! To you, Monty and the boys coming up the road from Kent must be as heart-swelling a thought as the survivors of the Death March on Bataan coming back into Manila from the concentration camps. *That's what acting is!*

You may say, "How can I think all those other things you put in parentheses when I'm speaking the lines in the script?"

The answer is—you don't! Remember, I told you that, before. *You think them when you are studying the role.*

HOW TO VISUALIZE A ROLE

Let us go back to that *mood-pattern* and *voice-pattern* business, this is a perfect example. You develop the mood in the preparation of the role by thinking as that English girl would think. And when you start to speak the lines, the emotions have already been planned and arranged for. *It will then require only a flick of the switch to turn on the light.*

I don't mean to say for a moment that spectators will ever get a definite picture of all of those emotional backgrounds, any more than they would in actual life. We never know *all* the things going on in other people's minds, unless they tell us about them; but we do sense keenly the emotional undercurrents when something *is* going on, no matter whether they tell us about them or not. *And so it is with acting.*

This way of working is the only road to that *seeming to be* the roles you play.

IDIOT'S DELIGHT *

HARRY: I know just how you feel, Doctor . . .
Back in 1918, I was a shill with a carnival show, and I was doing fine. The boss thought very highly of me. He offered to

* From "Idiot's Delight," by Robert Sherwood. Reprinted with permission from the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

give me a piece of the show, and I had a chance to get somewhere. And then what do you think happened? Along comes the United States Government and they drafted me! You're in the army now. They slapped me into a uniform and for three whole months before the Armistice, I was parading up and down guarding the Ashokan Reservoir. They were afraid *your* people might poison it. I've always figured that that little interruption ruined my career. But *I've* remained an *optimist* . . . I've remained an optimist because I'm essentially a student of human nature. Now, you dissect corpses and rats and similar unpleasant things. Well—it has been my job to dissect suckers! . . . And what have I found? Now, don't sneer at me, Doctor—but above everything else I've found Faith. Faith in peace on earth and good will to men—and faith that "Muma," the three-legged girl, really has got three legs. All my life, Doctor, I've been selling phoney goods to people of meagre intelligence and great faith. You'd think that would make me contemptuous of the human race, wouldn't you? But—

HOW TO VISUALIZE A ROLE

on the contrary—it has given *me* Faith. It has made me sure that no matter how much the meek may be bulldozed or gypped they *will* eventually inherit the earth.

Now, what does this speech tell you about this man? It should tell you a great deal. There is enough here to give you a pretty fair picture of Harry; how he has lived, his philosophy of life—and it is quite a philosophy. You could sum it up in this slogan, “Always give the suckers an even break—they’re pretty nice guys!”

Gathering my impressions from what Harry tells the doctor, I can’t see him as anything but a sort of “fringer” as far as the acting profession goes, but what a man! He has the actor’s temperament, though, and that rather inclines him to dramatize his point of view when he tells the doctor of his faith in “peace on earth and good will to men.” Watch how he retrieves himself when he fears he’s becoming “corny,” and quickly adds, “and faith that Muma, the three-legged girl, really has got three legs!” He actually could believe as readily in the one as in the other.

You see, Harry is a realist, and he knows be-

fore he finishes saying, “. . . and good will to men,” that there isn’t much “peace on earth,” or “good will,” either—but how he would love to believe there is!

You can imagine what the doctor has said before Harry speaks his first line. This doctor is plainly a medical man, since he dissects various unpleasant things, such as rats and men, and his experience has made him a bit pessimistic about mankind in general. Then too, the doctor was on the losing team in World War I—which would make him either an Austrian or a German. How do we know that? Because Harry says, “They were afraid *your* people might poison it”—that’s the reason he was guarding the Ashokan Reservoir in 1918, to keep some Hun from poisoning the water supply.

He merely slips in that observation to show what he was doing there, not in the least as an accusation.

You can imagine how stupid a man like Harry would feel, all rigged up in a doughboy’s outfit, plodding up and down on top of a reservoir. He didn’t even get into the fighting. Those three months were just enough to interrupt his “career” and keep him from reaching that wonderful position in life, part owner of a carnival show.

"But," he tells the doctor, "*I've* remained an *optimist*." And then he proceeds to tell why. It may be a little paradoxical to say that the foibles and gullibility of other men and women could make anyone have faith in their eventual triumph. But let us see what it is that gives Harry that faith.

I think it's because he has been on the "dishing-it-out" end, and has come to the conclusion that the "suckers" who get "taken" really come out better in the long run than the fellows who "take" them. Doesn't he say, "It has made me sure that no matter how much the meek may be bulldozed and gypped, they *will* eventually inherit the earth"?

The entire "feel" of this scene is that of two men, who have met quite casually, sitting quietly talking and philosophizing about life in general. Harry is rather a glib talker: he had to be if he were going to make an effective "shill," and you can bet he was; or if he were going to get anywhere "selling phoney goods," and that's an equally safe bet. You can just see him, with one foot in the door, selling a reluctant housewife some sure cure-all for that pain in her back!

Don't think of how Alfred Lunt or Clark Gable played "Harry"—they didn't copy each other—

but they were both wonderful "Harrys." *Think* the *man* himself. Absorb his philosophy, and play him from your own point of view and with your own physical tools. Don't try to make your voice, face, or body conform to any actor's mannerisms.

Take your time. These two men wouldn't be talking like this if they were in any hurry. Harry has listened to the doctor and when the doctor has finished with his pessimistic outlook, Harry smiles and says, "I know just how you feel, doctor." Of course he does, and he knows *why* the man of science feels that way: he's been looking at mankind through a microscope, and that's a little too close for perspective.

Then Harry starts to tell his experiences. He eases into it. He has all evening before him, and he's thinking back, and enjoying the chance to talk about himself—as who does not? He isn't speaking any piece! He's *remembering*, and every word he says is something that floats to the top as he talks. That doesn't mean that he goes into any brown study; Harry isn't the type of man who searches for words, they come readily enough, but we must see him relishing his experiences as he talks about them, and the conclusions to which they have brought him.

Think Harry!

HOW TO VISUALIZE A ROLE

CAVALCADE *

(Two young people are standing at the rail of an ocean liner, idly talking in the moonlight.)

EDITH: It's too big, the Atlantic, isn't it?

EDWARD: Far too big.

EDITH: And too deep.

EDWARD: Much, much too deep.

EDITH: I don't care a bit, do you?

EDWARD: Not a scrap.

EDITH: Wouldn't it be awful if a magician came to us and said: Unless you count accurately every fish in the Atlantic you die tonight?

EDWARD: We should die tonight.

EDITH: How much would you mind—*dying*, I mean?

EDWARD: I don't know . . . a good deal, I expect.

EDITH: I don't believe I should mind so very much now. You see we could never in our whole lives be happier than we are now, could we?

EDWARD: Darling, there are different sorts of happiness.

* From: "Cavalcade" by Noel Coward. Copyright, 1931, 1932 by Noel Coward, reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

MOTION PICTURE ACTING

EDITH: *This* is the best sort.

EDWARD: Sweetheart. (*He pulls her to him and kisses her.*)

EDITH: Don't darling, we don't want any more of the stewards to know we're on our honeymoon.

EDWARD: Why not? It gives them so much vicarious pleasure. Most of them have forgotten what it was like.

EDITH: Are all honeymoons like this?

EDWARD: Exactly.

EDITH: Oh, Edward—that's rather disheartening, isn't it? I do so want this to be unique.

EDWARD: It is, for us.

EDITH: Did you ever think when we were children going to the Zoo, and playing soldiers, that we should ever be married?

EDWARD: Of course I didn't.

EDITH: Was I nice as a child?

EDWARD: Horrible!

EDITH: So were you, and so was Joe—vile. You always used to take sides against me.

EDWARD: And yet we all liked one another really.

EDITH: I think I liked Joe better than you, but then he was younger and easier to man-

HOW TO VISUALIZE A ROLE

age. Dear Joe, he was awfully funny at the wedding, wasn't he?

EDWARD: Ribald little beast!

EDITH: He has no reverence I'm afraid.

EDWARD: Absolutely none.

EDITH: He is passing gallantly through the chorus-girl phase now, isn't he?

EDWARD: Gallantly but not quickly.

EDITH: Well, darling, you took your time over it.

EDWARD: Now then, Edith—

EDITH: You had several affairs before you married me, didn't you?

EDWARD: Light of my life, shut up!

EDITH: You'd be awfully cross if *I* had, wouldn't you?

EDWARD: Had what?

EDITH: Affairs—love affairs—before you.

EDWARD: Did you?

EDITH: Hundreds.

EDWARD: Liar.

EDITH: I rather wish I had, really. Perhaps I should have learnt some tricks to hold you with when you begin to get tired of me.

EDWARD: I never shall, tricks or no tricks.

EDITH: Yes, you will one day. You're bound to, people always do. This complete loveli-

MOTION PICTURE ACTING

ness that we feel together now will fade, so many years and the gilt wears off the gingerbread, and just the same as the stewards, we shall have forgotten what it was like.

EDWARD: Answer me one thing, truly, dearest. Have you ever seen gingerbread with gilt on it?

EDITH: Never!

EDWARD: Then the whole argument is disposed of. Anyhow, look at father and mother, they're perfectly happy and devoted, and they always have been.

EDITH: They had a better chance at the beginning. Things weren't changing so swiftly, life wasn't so restless.

EDWARD: How long do you give us?

EDITH: I don't know—and Edward, I don't care. This is our moment, complete and heavenly. I'm not afraid of anything. This is our own, for ever.

EDWARD: Do you think a nice warming glass of sherry would make it any more heavenly?

EDITH: You have no soul, darling, but I'm very attached to you. Come on . . .

(He picks up her evening wrap, which is hanging over the rail, and we see the

life-preserver—the name on it H.M.S. Titanic.)

In this scene, an attractive young couple on their honeymoon are standing at the rail on an ocean liner. The life-preserver bearing the ship's name is hidden from us by the girl's evening wrap, thrown over the rail, and we do not dream of the fate in store for these charming young people until just as they walk out of our lives, and out of life itself. In a few short hours, the Atlantic will indeed be far too big and much too deep, but now there is not the faintest premonition of impending disaster in anything they say.

When Edith makes that casual remark, "It's too big, the Atlantic, isn't it?"—it is nothing more than an idle observation of a girl so divinely happy that there is no need for any very intelligent flow of words. Edward smilingly agrees that it certainly is.

With one of those sudden quirks, which he finds amusing and stimulating, she twinkles at him, "I don't care a bit, do you?" He vows he doesn't—"Not a scrap."

Then she gives her imagination freer rein and says, in mock solemnity, "Wouldn't it be awful

if a magician came to us and said: 'Unless you count accurately every fish in the Atlantic you die tonight'?"

He smiles and plays up to her a little as he says with a shrug, "We should die tonight."

When she asks, "How much would you mind . . . *dying*, I mean?", it isn't with any solemn foreboding. It is no more portentous than if she said, "How much would you mind dying when you're eighty?"

He answers, naturally enough, that he expects he'd mind it a good deal. She tells him she doesn't believe she would, because there never could be any greater happiness for them than they are living right now. He replies that there are different sorts of happiness, and there we see the vast difference in the thought and feeling on marriage between men and women. A man, a good man, instinctively looks forward to the founding of a dynasty. He wants a beloved wife, the mother of his children. A woman, above all else, wants a dear companion and lover *and* children. A man can look forward to middle-age and a growing family with no such qualms as beset a woman. He will be harrowed by no fears that his wife "doesn't love him any more"; but if *she* lives to be eighty, she will look back longingly to their honeymoon, and could tell you,

to the day, just when he started kissing her on the cheek or with a mild little peck on the lips *unless* she has fallen out of love with him completely during their years together.

Edith cuddles against Edward's arm, and says, speaking of the different sorts of happiness: "*This* is the best sort." In that, she states the case for women.

The banter passes from the stewards to honeymoons in general, and their own marriage in particular. Joe, who is, I imagine, Edward's younger brother, serves to introduce a subject Edith hasn't quite been able to get around to until right now. When she brings up the question of Joe's being in the "chorus-girl phase," she uses it to twit Edward over his own behavior. You can be sure Edith has kept well informed on everything Edward was doing while he was away at university or, perhaps, spending week-ends in London. (And why "London"? Because, you will remember, the Titanic was an English ship, sailing from an English port to be lost in mid-ocean on her maiden voyage, that dreadful night in April, 1912.)

Edith is realistic enough—and women are much greater realists than men, who are the true dyed-in-the-wool idealists of this world—to know that life cannot be held at its ecstatic peak. She *knows*

the complete loveliness of the honeymoon will fade, and it saddens her, ever so little.

He asks her, kiddingly, how long she thinks their happiness will last: "How long do you give us?" She tells him with a kind of exalted resignation, "I don't know—and Edward, I don't care. This is our moment, complete and heavenly. I'm not afraid of anything. This is our own, for ever." This great love and happiness is *enough*—she seems to say—not only for all of life, but for all eternity.

How can we tell if some psychic nudge made her say, "I'm not afraid of anything," or if it were merely a chance remark? Whatever its source, I'm bound to feel that Edith loved her husband too much to leave him; and since there were not life boats enough for all the passengers, that she would stay at his side until the great ship slipped under the icy sea, carrying with it more than eleven hundred men and women.

They walk away from us with smiling banter on their lips and shining happiness in their hearts; and only then, as he lifts her cape from the rail and wraps it about her, do we see that fate has marked these lovers for her own in that one terribly tragic word. . . . TITANIC.

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